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VASUDEO BALVANT PHADKE

# **VASUDEO BALVANT PHADKE**

**First Indian Rebel  
against  
British Rule**

**BY  
V. S. JOSHI**



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**TO ALL THE MARTYRS  
WHO LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES AT THE  
ALTAR OF THE MOTHERLAND,  
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED  
IN GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION AND HONOUR  
OF THEIR UNTOLD SUFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES  
AND HEROIC MARTYRDOM  
IN THE CAUSE OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE**



## P R E F A C E

Close upon the great success of the biography of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke written by me in Marathi, there was a repeated demand by non-Marathi-knowing readers for its English version. I am, therefore, glad that this biography is at last being published for their benefit.

The object of this book is to place before my countrymen the life and times of a celebrated patriot who, moved by the pitiable condition of his people under foreign rule, was the first to rise in an armed revolt against the foreign power to break the shackles of slavery and establish an *Indian Republic* as far back as 1879. His was India's earliest attempt at winning her freedom.

With the attainment of Indian independence, the soldiers of Indian freedom have become curious about their first ancestor in the struggle for Indian independence. The honour of being their first ancestor undoubtedly goes to Vasudeo Balvant in every respect as narrated in the following pages.

When thirty years ago I saw, as a child, the imposing portrait of the rebel patriot, it made a deep impression on me, and I longed to know his entire life; for nothing much was known about it till then, although a plethora of anecdotes and legends had clustered around his name.

He was a rebel against the British Government. Nobody could, therefore, dare write anything about him in his days. And his contemporaries had passed away when times turned favourable for the venture. There was, therefore, no published material worth the name on his life. In this darkness I worked over a long period, searching through a labyrinth of newspaper files; travelled to distant places, went through scores of books, interviewed many persons and entered into correspondence with the Governments of Bombay and Aden for the account of his life. At last I succeeded, in 1947, in reconstructing his entire life account based on historical testimony as contained in this book.

The deeds and careers of men in history must be judged on the background of the environment in which they worked. Unless this is done, it will never be possible for us to appreciate their work. Movements and deeds, which might appear to be of no consequence in present times, had often involved uncommon courage and enormous suffering and sacrifice in their times.

Readers will, therefore, do well to go back to the seventies of the last century for adequate understanding and appreciation of the struggle and greatness of Vasudeo Balvant.

A good deal of material, hitherto unpublished, is included in this edition of the biography. It is gleaned from the confidential records of the Government of Bombay, to which I had no access at the time of writing the biography in Marathi. It relates to the deliberations in high Government circles on the political charges on which Vasudeo Balvant was to be prosecuted, their anxiety to secure capital punishment for him, the opinion of the Legal Remembrancer in the case, and more details about the exile of some of the associates of Vasudeo Balvant.

Other additions of interest made in this edition include the account of Shivaji's attempt at self-sacrifice at Shree Shaila Mallikarjun where Vasudeo Balvant tried it in 1879, the glowing tributes paid to Vasudeo Balvant by Indian journals and information about the part played by his revolt in hastening the birth of the Congress.

Vasudeo Balvant Phadke was popularly known as Vasudeo Balvant according to the custom of his times when persons were referred to without their surnames, and he has since been famous as Vasudeo Balvant.

Many friends have helped me in my task of collecting material for the biography and later, also by going through the manuscript and proofs of the book. I am grateful to all of them for their valuable help.

Vasudeo Balvant's faith in the bright future of his nation was fully vindicated when India became free and redeemed her tryst with destiny. I leave it to the readers to scan this initial chapter of the history of the Indian struggle for freedom, and enjoy its grandeur as revealed in this book.

“SUKRUT”  
127 SHIVAJI PARK, BOMBAY 28

V. S. JOSHI

*November 4, 1959*

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SUN SETS ON FREE INDIA

**F**OR India under British rule, the year 1818 had ever been a year of national grief, the anguish of her soul. For it marked the end of the liberty of the land and the beginning of a calamitous and wearisome dark night of prolonged subjection for India. The flag of liberty was hurled down the walls of Shanwarwada at Poona, and the aggressive Union Jack began to flaunt defiantly in its place.

Rome was not built in a day; nor was the British Empire in India built overnight. The onslaught of British diplomacy on the moribund Mahratta Empire had begun quite a few years before, when the British set their triumphant foot on the Indian soil to work for the realisation of their colonial ambitions and mercantile aspirations in this land. The chaotic conditions in different parts of the country afforded good scope for their designs, and before launching their successful attack on the Mahratta Empire, the last citadel of Indian freedom, they had subdued almost all other princes and generals, who were likely to challenge them in Northern and Southern India, as also their European rivals like the French and the Portuguese engaged in a similar venture. Even the dark future which loomed large before the Mahratta chiefs like the Scindia and the Holkar failed to stir them to act unitedly against the British who separately defeated them on different battlefields. Their master Bajirao II beat disgraceful retreats at various places, and at last sought refuge at Brahmavarta where afterwards he lived on the crumbs of pension and favours thrown by the British rulers! India saw its political doom at this ill-foreboding hour of the Peshwa's surrender.

Mazzini has said: "Where there is no vision the people perish." People of such vision saw their impending ruin in the new regime and pondered over remedies to forestall the consequences of slavery. Those who lost their privileges and possessions went a step further and resorted to action. The sporadic attempts at defiance of the British rule were generally confined to this class of people. Their efforts started almost since the inception of the British rule. Opposition to foreign rule was of course implicit in their attempts; but the attempts were not



inspired by an ideological passion for national freedom in the modern sense.

The famous plunders of Umaji Naik in 1827 and the revolt of the Kolis under Bhau Khare and others in 1839 represented this category of direct action. Umaji enjoyed the rights of a fort-command as recently as 1815. But he was now deprived of them. Khare and others also feared the loss of their rights and possessions because of the British rule. They were, therefore, indignant at the end of the Peshwa's rule. These attempts extended to both sides of the Sahyadris, and created quite a sensation till their moving spirits were captured and executed.

The common man of India, however, only felt relieved to see the end of insecurity which he had to face under Indian rulers, and looked forward to a peaceful life under the new Government, free from the armed expeditions of native knights.

Cunning and calculating, the British also quickly effected some reforms with resolute will, which had a consoling effect on the majority of the Indian people. The British banned the *sati* in 1829, saved innocent widows from the custom of mad and not unoften, forced suicides, and made the high seas safe from the raids of pirates by 1837. Their administrative offices in India were in need of an army of clerks. They, therefore, introduced a system of English education in this country which produced a literate proletariat to run their administration in the lower ranks of various services with occasional promotions to higher posts.

While taming the conquered races for adjustment to their rule the British set about wiping out the sources of inspiration which would make the Indians hark back to Swaraj. Lord Dalhousie became the Governor-General of India in 1848, and immediately initiated an imperialist policy of extending the British Empire in this country. His savage hand first destroyed the throne founded by Shivaji the Great, and the *gadi* of Satara disappeared in the jaws of British aggression in 1848 for want of a natural heir. Thereafter, he also annexed prominent native States like Jhansi and Nagpur on similar grounds. These tyrannical deeds of Dalhousie infuriated the princely world. Fanned by the subsequent oppressive acts of his Government involving outrages on religious beliefs and local customs the resentment of the princes against the British Government hardened into a determined refusal on their part to be effaced from the map of India without a fight.

Bajirao II died at Brahmapur in 1851. He had adopted as his son a brilliant boy belonging to the family of the Bhats of

Vengaon. This son, named Nanasaheb, claimed his father's pension from the British Government. But where native States were denied to adopted heirs political pension stood no chance of being granted to such claimants. Nana's request was, therefore, turned down by the British Government. The injustice inflicted on him by the foreign power strengthened his resolve to wage war against the foreign power and strike for Swaraj.

Nana's resolve synchronised with similar determination of other princes and princesses, like the Nawab of Ayodhya and his Begams and the Ranee of Jhansi, and they planned a countrywide War of Independence in 1857.

But the first shots in the war were misfired days in advance of the appointed hour, and the revolution of 1857 broke out at Meerut on the glorious 10th of May 1857.

The conflagration soon enveloped capital after capital in its flames; province after province rose in revolt for the sake of independence. Thousands of Hindustanees unsheathed their swords and shouldered their rifles in defence of the standard of freedom, and thousands of heroes gladly faced martyrdom. Excepting the almost contemporary revolution in Italy, history does not record any other revolution which displayed the peak of sacrifice, suffering and bravery of patriots in the cause of freedom and religion, as did the revolution of 1857 in India. The revolutionary spirit and thrilling scenes seen during the French revolution in the city of Paris were enacted in at least a score of Indian capitals in 1857.

A number of European historians with a partisan spirit have described the upheaval as "mutiny". But if an exception among those who have misinterpreted history proves the truth the following excerpt from the pen of Justin McCarthy, himself a European, would explode the myth of the upheaval being a mutiny, and bring out its true nature.

Says Justin McCarthy : "... It was not alone the sepoys who rose in revolt. It was not by any means a merely military mutiny. It was a combination of military grievance, national hatred and religious fanaticism against English occupiers of India. The quarrel about the greased cartridges was but the chance spark. . . . If that spark had not lighted it some other would have done the work . . . ." (The Meerut sepoys) "had found in one moment, a leader, a flag, and a cause and the mutiny was transfigured into a revolutionary war. When they reached the Jumna glittering in the morning light, . . . they had all unconsciously seized one of the great critical moments of

history, and converted a military mutiny into a national and religious war !”<sup>1</sup>

Although the struggle ended in smoke and its leaders met with tragic ends the echoes of the War of Independence resounded in India for a number of years.

When the revolution of 1857 broke out its progress was followed with breathless silence by many prominent men in India. But after it failed they became bold enough to speak out their mind over the upheaval as the whole of India again continued to enjoy the slumber of soporific slavery. A glimpse of their intellectual degradation can be had from the following opinion of Raosaheb Mandlik, recognised as the spokesman of contemporary vocal and intelligent section of the people. In a personal letter he refers to the upheaval of 1857 as “a doltish explosion which spelled disaster to our nation . . .” and says : “The Company’s Raj has a desire to reform, improve on mistakes and render justice to the aggrieved. . . . But to what extent this mutiny of the sepoys would now retard our progress, it is not possible to comprehend.”<sup>2</sup>

The British Government tried to cheer up the Indian people filled with a sense of national frustration at the failure of the war of 1857 by the soothing balm of modern conveniences and amenities of life. The railroad and telegraph, which were common amenities in Europe, were introduced in India as a special blessing of modern times, and a University was established at Bombay in 1857 to turn out a host of educated clerks every year. These showy trifles blurred the people’s vision, and they failed to realise the material disaster wrought by slavery in this land. Many of them began to praise the British Raj with renewed vigour. Mr. Gopal Hari Deshmukh, popularly known as “Lokahitavadi” was reputed to be a man of thought. He was fearless in his expression and progressive in his views. But even his writings breathed an inferiority complex which was as pro-foreigner as it was self-forgetful. He says in one of his famous letters written in those times : “. . . The common man amongst the English possesses a thousand times greater personal qualities than an ordinary Hindu !” and “. . . At present the English people are a hundred times more enlightened than the Hindu people, and God has made over this country to them (English) so that the Hindu people

<sup>1</sup> Justin McCarthy, *A History of Our Own Times*, Vol. III, pp. 46, 47, 50-51.

<sup>2</sup> G. T. Madkholkar and S. N. Banahatti, *Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar* (Marathi), p. 3.

might imbibe that wisdom.”<sup>3</sup> Comment is superfluous. Even the times during which these thoughts were cherished by Mr. Deshmukh cannot condone the servile denunciation of his own race by him in this strange way.

In this general disheartening state of nationalism and self-respect, two imposing personalities in Maharashtra looked into the distant future in religious and social spheres. Of these, Vishnubuwa Brahmachari, a religious Pandit, was born in 1825, and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule in 1827. When the Christian missionaries played havoc on Hindu society through proselytisation and conversion of gullible and destitute Hindus Vishnubuwa battled against the aggression with argument and organisation. A Government servant in early life, he resigned from his service and took to renunciation. He was a voracious reader of ancient scriptures, and his pride of Hindu religion and civilisation was only heightened by his learning. About 1856 he permanently settled in Bombay, and had frequent heated discourses with Christian missionaries on the sands of Chowpatty when he often vanquished them. He completely stopped the forced conversions of Hindus within a few years, and worked in the field with indefatigable energy till his death in 1871.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was a born patriot. But he is known to posterity more as a social reformer than as a soldier of freedom. When he was twenty-one he opened his own private school to educate women. He had enlisted the co-operation of his wife in the cause after he himself had educated her. The times then frowned upon women's education. The work of Phule in this field was, therefore, doubly laudable on account of the progressive views which inspired it. Phule founded the “Satya-shodhak Samaj” in 1873, and preached abolition of caste distinctions and privileges based on caste through the Samaj. He worked for these ideals for many years and passed away in 1890.

What was the state of the Indian nation at this stage? For the sake of perspicuity it may be stated that the Indian people were not welded into a homogeneous and cohesive entity. The Indian National Congress itself having been founded in 1885, national feeling was not so intense as in later days.

Social conditions and concepts were heart-rending. Illiteracy was so colossal that education was assessed in terms of completion of one, two or three English books. Passing the standard V

<sup>3</sup> Lokahitavadi's *Shatapatre* (Marathi), pp. 43, 46.

was the normal standard of education for middle classes ; passing the School Final Examination was a step further and the Matriculation Examination, a very rare distinction. The middle-class people left education after passing a few standards, and willingly joined Government service as the normal avocation in life.

Literature as such had no existence. Translation of English books was the limit of literary achievement for men of letters. Poems in praise of Queen Victoria were invariably found in text-books. They were fondly recited in schools and they provoked nobody.

The so-called untouchables and lower middle classes themselves considered it a sin to pollute by their touch or shadow the so-called high-born Brahmins. Those, who consumed food touched by Mohammedans or Christians, lost caste and were ostracised by the society.

Ignorance about the achievements of modern science was also amazing. Anxious relations of the sick hurried down to the mystics, and invoked, through their *mantras* or sacrificial rituals, blessings of God or favour of the evil spirit to cure ailing persons, in preference to medicine, ascribing the calamity to divine wrath or displeasure of evil spirit and not to any bodily disorder. It was due to this ignorance that when railway trains began to run in 1853 coconuts were liberally cracked by the people in front of their steam engines. They were intended as an offering to the evil spirit, suspected to be driving the steam engines ; for the engines were seen running without any manifest motive power !

In such circumstances, political agitation had no place in India and the word "Swaraj" was anathema. If any adventurous nationalist halted a wayfarer and questioned him whether he never felt that his country should be free, quick came the reply : "To set our country free ? To overthrow the British Government ? What a sin ; what madness !" Thus, not only was the British rule unshakable but its victims never thought of shaking off the foreign yoke at all !

## CHAPTER II

### CHILDHOOD OF VASUDEO BALVANT

**T**HE family of the Phadkes of Shirdhon has made a name for its noble sacrifice in the cause of Indian freedom. The Phadkes hailed from Kelshi, a hamlet in the Konkan. They were people of modest substance, and their straightened circumstances soon compelled them to desert the rugged country of their birth to seek fortunes in distant places. They then migrated to Shirdhon where they settled down.

The village of Shirdhon occupies an important position in the Kolaba District. At first it was included in the Thana District. It stands at a strategic point beyond Panvel on the way to Poona. The Panvel creek borders on its north. Beyond the creek are seen expansive fields and the commons spreading eastwards to the hillocks. The red-soiled dusty road meanders past Shirdhon, and breaking through the hills goes towards Poona. The hill passage beyond Shirdhon is called the Kalhai pass. The entire region was then known as the province of Kalyan, and a high political office, which the Phadkes held, indicates that there existed near Shirdhon a major administrative centre in the days of Swaraj.

The ancient old-fashioned mansion of the Phadkes at Shirdhon is located on the radius of a semi-circular chain of houses. It possesses artistic woodwork displaying rich workmanship and robust build. Its position testifies to its prominence among the houses which sprang up subsequently at Shirdhon. It was in this house that Vasudeo Balvant was born. Reflective minds are moved with curious sentiments while gazing at this historical birthplace of the famous patriot.

The Phadkes were Chitpavan Brahmins. Tradition traces them as descendants of Lord Parshuram who created their home province the Konkan. This land from the foot of the Sahyadris to the Western Ocean had a legendary birth as Lord Parshuram swept back the ocean with the arrow from his bow. Whether we believe the legend or interpret it to mean that Lord Parshuram colonised the region anew for human habitation, the traits of the Chitpavans from the Konkan have left an indelible mark on history as men of great ability. The British administrators and historians noted with particular attention the spirit of

revolt found among the Chitpavans, and launched a tirade against them in their writings and utterances. Singling them out as a rebel race, Sir Valentine Chirol vitriolically attacked them, of which the following is a specimen :

"The stronghold of orthodox reaction was in the Mahratta Deccan, and its stoutest fighters were drawn from the Chitpavan Brahmans who had never forgiven us for snatching the cup of power from their lips just when they saw the inheritance of the Mogul Empire within their grasp."<sup>1</sup>

At another place Chirol writes under the caption "Brahminism and Disaffection in the Deccan": "Among many others (Chitpavan Brahmins), perhaps indeed amongst the great majority, there has undoubtedly been preserved for the last hundred years, from the time of downfall of the Peshwa dominion to the present day, an unbroken tradition of hatred towards British rule, an undying hope that it might some day be subverted and their own ascendancy restored."<sup>2</sup>

The Phadkes came down to Shirdhon before three centuries, as appears from the following conversation of Vasudeo Balvant with one of his followers, who was tried afterwards for participating in the revolt led by Vasudeo Balvant. He told the trial Court: "... We asked our leader (Vasudeo Balvant) what he wanted us to do after bringing so many of us together. He said they meant to loot all the villages that once were theirs. Wassudew Balvant said that they were *inam* in his family in the times of the Badshahas."<sup>3</sup> But the history of the family now available dates back only to the times of Anantrao Phadke, better known as "Killedar Phadke", grandfather of Vasudeo Balvant.

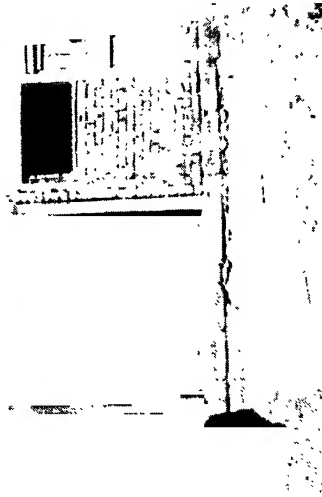
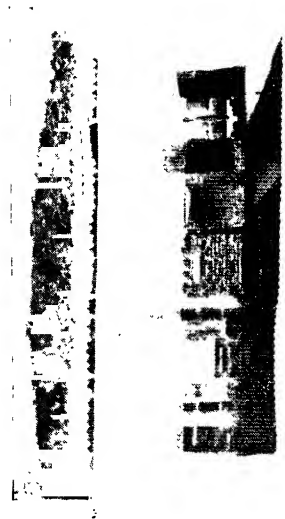
Anantrao held the command of the fort of Karnala near Shirdhon till it was surrendered to the British in 1818. He was, therefore, called Killedar. Built upon a high steep hillock two and a half miles away from Shirdhon, the Karnala overlooks the Kalhai pass which breaks into grassy tracts of land through shadowy and luxuriant forests. The fort resembles a mere mountain peak from a distance. There is no well-built road leading to its walls. The flight to Karnala along a narrow path is literally an "uphill" task, and it takes about two hours for anyone to reach the main gate of the fort if he starts for the fort from the Kalhai pass.

A bridgelike path of dilapidated crumbled steps over a narrow

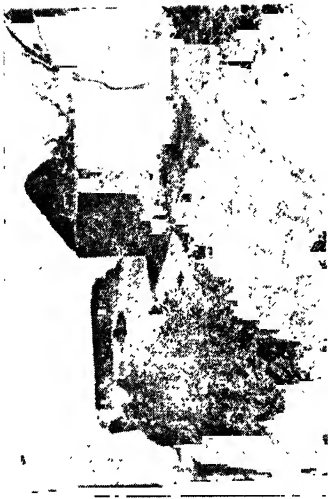
<sup>1</sup> Sir Valentine Chirol, *India—Old and New*, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, p. 39.

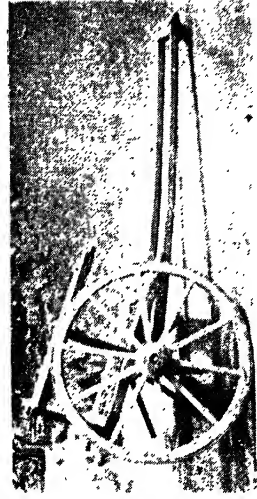
<sup>3</sup> The *Bombay Gazette*, July 19, 1879.



Bntiplace of Vazudeo Balvant



Main Quadrangle of Karnala



The Goat Cart

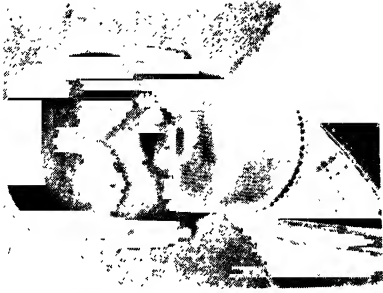




The Tutelar Deity



Pandurang Balvant Phadke



Mathutai Phadke  
(Mrs. Sitabai Karve)

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

Vasudeo Balvant's Signature  
(Marathi; Modi Script)

hill-top runs up to its main entrance. The entrance is now devoid of its doors. There are two front towers on either of its sides. The quadrangle beyond the entrance is demarcated by remnants of the foundations of walls which are no more. It once housed the administrative units in the fort. At a distance rises a huge dome of natural solid basalt rock, impregnable and insurmountable, and a marginal passage of bare three feet encircling it is terminated by the side walls interrupted by two rear towers. Fourteen water tanks with natural fountains in the crest of the fort include one called the "Dark Tank". The fort is half as high as Sinhagad. Its forces commanded a wide range from Campoli to Pen on one side and Alibag to Revas on the other in its heyday. It had then such a strategic importance that it was one of the few forts surrendered by Shivaji to Aurangzeb in 1665<sup>4</sup> and recaptured by him in 1670 after his escape from Agra and safe return to the Deccan.<sup>5</sup>

Anantrao held the fief around Karnala till his death. He was born in 1760. He possessed a rare physical stature with natural gift of long arms, and palms touching the knees. He was an erudite scholar of Sanskrit, well versed in ancient Hindu Dharmashastras and was an expert chess-player. Anantrao added to his insignificant estate new rice fields yielding scores of *khandis* of rice every year. His milch cattle alone numbered two hundred and odd. Industrious by nature, he disliked servants attending upon his person. He was extremely fond of planting trees, and soon created a small plantation of over two thousand new fruit trees in his own land. They included mango, tamarind and cashew trees and scores of saplings of other trees specially brought from neighbours.

Anantrao was resolute, daring and brave. He flew into a rage when the British demanded an immediate unconditional surrender of the fort of Karnala in 1818. He fortified the place and ordered his garrison to a desperate preparation of war! His patriotic but hopeless struggle, however, continued hardly for three days and on the fourth, he had to surrender the fort to the superior might of the British.<sup>6</sup>

The brave old man had a son named Balvantrao. Born in 1821, Balvantrao was brought up in the glory of his paternal title and was nicknamed *Subhedar*. Balvantrao had fully

<sup>4</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji And His Times*, p. 131.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> "In January 1818 Colonel Prother with a force of 380 Europeans, 800 Native Infantry and a battering train took the important forts of Karnala, Rajmachi & Koari."—*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Vol. XIII, Part II, p. 522.

imbibed his father's fighting spirit. The Phadkes had in their stable a precious horse which was considered to be an auspicious animal. Balvantrao used to mount the horse while still a boy and eventually became an expert horserider.

Balvantrao was married to a rich bride, Bhikubai, the eldest daughter of Vishwanathpant *alias* Appa Borgaonkar from Kalyan. Her name was changed to Saraswatibai after marriage. She was a charming lady both in appearance and manners. To this couple was born a son, Vasudeo, who entered the world about 5 p.m. on 4th November 1845. Anantrao was now a grey-haired man of eighty-five. He rejoiced at the birth of his grandson, and celebrated the occasion with pomp and splendour.

After passing his early childhood at Shirdhon Vasudeo moved to Kalyan at his maternal grandfather's house. He had inherited the beauty of his mother and the vigour of his militant ancestors, and was a handsome child in colour and cut. His fair complexion, muscular body and compelling bluish eyes made him a fascinating pet child for all. His maternal grandmother, Anandibai, was a second mother to him. He called his mother "mamma", but his uncles' identical address in respect of their mother confused the personalities of Vasudeo's mother and grandmother. Vasudeo, therefore, began to call his mother "my mamma" and the grandmother "uncle's mamma". And after a time straightway started calling his mother by her own name—Saraswati, nobody grudging this usurpation of an elder's right by him! For Vasudeo loved his mother more than any other thing in the world, and meant no disrespect to her in calling her by her own name.

Vasudeo's robustness and keen intelligence delighted his grandfather. But his father, whom he called Dada, viewed his rebellious and mischievous nature with anxiety. When he tried to teach Vasudeo the Marathi alphabets the child felt perturbed and ran away.

When Vasudeo was six his thread ceremony was performed with great pomp. A few days after this event, however, a sad news fell upon his ears. His nonagenarian grandfather, Anant, slipped during one of his walks in the garden. He had a fracture of bone in his leg and it was permanently disabled. He, however, continued to move about in a servant-borne *doli* and plant trees in his garden. While trudging behind on such occasions Vasudeo questioned him: "Anna, why do you plant these trees even at this ripe age?" And the old man replied: "I plant them so that my descendants should be happy and prosperous, enjoying the fruit of my labour."

Vasudeo had a distaste for learning the alphabets or elementary arithmetic. He was more fond of physical culture. He was so robust that he used to gulp and digest a daily quantum of three-fourth seer of milk with ease when he was four years of age. He immensely enjoyed races of bullock carts, and this earned him the nickname *chhakdya*. At times, he disappeared from the house in the early morning and returned home when the sun touched the zenith. His rebellious nature landed him in violent fights with his adversaries who lodged their complaints against him with his parents. Vasudeo dodged the consequences by seeking refuge in waste-houses or lumber-rooms. Enraged at his mischief, his father scolded him ; but the Borgaonkars hoped that he would improve with growing years. In fact his maternal grandfather purchased a brand new goat cart to satisfy his roaming instinct. And Vasudeo strutted about majestically in his cart drawn by a strong billy-goat, to the merriment of many.

As a child Vasudeo was impetuous, self-confident and restless. His bouts of wild merriment often created an uproar in the house. One day the river Ulhas near Kalyan was in monsoon spate. The city streets were flooded, and even the front yard of Borgaonkar's wada was under water. Vasudeo disappeared from the house on the afternoon of the stormy day. After considerable search for the child the suspicion of the elders fell upon the swollen river. Vasudeo's mother sobbed bitterly ; but the cunning lad was safe in the house. Lying concealed behind a huge wooden box, Vasudeo enjoyed the fun for a time. But his mother's tears moved him and he came out and stood before her. His mother smiled, lifted him up to her bosom and kissed him, heaving a sigh of relief that he was safe.

Vasudeo was ten when his grandfather Anantrao, now five short for being a centenarian, breathed his last in 1855, and an eventful life of ninety-five long years crowded with mundane activities came to an end.

And with it ended the frequent absence of Vasudeo from school ; for his father now made his son's attendance at school his own special concern. Vasudeo was sent to the primary school at Kalyan in 1855. At this school, he completed the course in arithmetic up to vulgar fractions and also studied geometry. His precocity was manifest in a secret manner during this period. Dr. Wilson, the well-known missionary, used to conduct an English school at Kalyan outside the morning and evening hours of the primary school. Vasudeo took a fancy for the new English language. And as his Dada disliked the studies in the English school, he joined Dr. Wilson's English school without

Dada's knowledge. The roots of his great command of the English language in afterlife have to be traced to the lessons he had in Dr. Wilson's school at Kalyan.

In the Marathi school Vasudeo studied under the tutorial patronage of Sakharam Shivram Kelkar, a typical teacher of the early British regime. He was kind-hearted and affectionate towards Vasudeo who lovingly called him "Tatya Pantoji". In Dr. Wilson's school Vasudeo had another kind master named Shridharshastri Jambhekar. Tatya Pantoji at least once in a way used the master's rod. But Jambhekar never so much as knew the teacher's cane. He was, therefore, Vasudeo's most favourite teacher throughout his schooling at Kalyan. Vasudeo treasured many happy recollections of both these teachers for long, and fondly mentions them in his autobiography.

Events in India, in the meantime, moved on to a crisis at terrific speed, and on 10th May 1857, ever glorious in the history of the Indian struggle for freedom, began India's first War of Independence. It soon assumed epic dimensions and its news travelled down to the Deccan at immense speed. Balvantrao read out the reports of the "mutiny" from newspapers every day, and 12-year-old Vasudeo listened to the reports with rapt attention as he squatted nearby, throwing his tiny palms with fingers interlocked around the knees. From amidst the clouds of smoke generated by the war, would shine forth before his eyes the personalities of Nanasaheb, the Rane of Jhansi, Tatia Tope and others, shedding lustre of bravery and heroism, and with a strong passion of patriotism swelling in his heart he wondered if he too could one day wage war for the emancipation of his country.

Shortly afterwards, in 1859, Vasudeo finished his primary education, and prevailed upon his father to allow him to take higher education. He departed for Bombay where he studied in the secondary school founded by the great philanthropist, Nana Shankarshet, for four months more. He then proceeded to Poona for further education. While at Bombay Vasudeo was greatly impressed by the headmaster of the school, Govind Vishnu Bhide, because of his smiling countenance, quiet disposition and knack of making his lessons interesting.

At Poona Vasudeo joined the famous Poona High School housed in the Vishrambag Wada. It was the oldest English school with the Poona College as its allied institution. Vasudeo had at this school the Howard series as the prescribed text-books, of which he soon finished the first three books. Prospective service on the strength of passing the final examination was not

his aim in life. And so, equipped with education sufficient for the routine life, he left the school after two years without appearing for the School Final Examination. The progress of education about this time can be seen from the fact that only four students had passed the B.A. examination of the Bombay University in 1862. Till 1877, two years before Vasudeo Balvant rose in revolt, not more than 179 students in all had passed the B.A. examination in the whole Bombay Presidency. The education which Vasudeo Balvant received was; therefore, such as was being received by an average middle-class Indian in those days, and according to the standards of his times he undoubtedly belonged to the educated generation of his days. Besides, Vasudeo Balvant had read a lot of extra-curricular books while in the Poona High School and attained remarkable mastery over English. The majority of the students left the school dreaming of a flourishing service. The school, however, saw its solitary first student in Vasudeo Phadke who left its portals with a resolve to strive for the greater glory of an independent motherland.

## CHAPTER III

### MARRIAGE AND SERVICE

**W**HEN Vasudeo completed his education three big ceremonies—the thread ceremony of his brother and the marriage ceremonies of two of his sisters—had taken place in his family on a very grand scale, and they had greatly depleted the finances of the Phadke family. Balvantrao consequently desired Vasudeo to take up service somewhere near Shirdhon. Shreeman Vithappa Khandappa Gulve, a leading shroff of Panvel, was an intimate friend of Balvantrao. Balvantrao thought of a job for Vasudeo at Gulve's business firm at Panvel. Vasudeo, however, signified his disapproval of the plan to his father.

This refusal of Vasudeo alarmed his father who feared the reappearance of the defiant attitude of his childhood in his son. So he made an alternative proposal which elders often sponsor to avoid dissensions between them and the younger generation in routine life. It was that for Vasudeo's marriage which ultimately won his consent.

A number of families aspired to forge ties of blood with the Shirdhonkar Phadke family whose fame had spread far and wide, and Vasudeo got tired of repeating before the would-be fathers-in-law, the then current bridegroom's test of squatting with his feet turned back at the knees, the heels touching the hips, to display his *modi* handwriting. His father recommended bride after bride; but not one came to his liking. Some lacked the qualities he expected of them; others the social status in the opinion of Balvantrao, and still some others had unfavourable horoscopes. And so Vasudeo would not make the final choice of his bride.

The unusual delay in the matter evoked trenchant comments in circles close to the family, a frequent experience in such cases. These comments pained Vasudeo. He thought: "Should I not be able to select a single bride out of so many? Am I born to blacken the reputation of my family?" While Vasudeo's mind oscillated between such self-rebukes and self-justification that he was helpless in the matter the horizon of uncertainty brightened with signs of an agreeable choice, when Tryambak Ganesh *alias* Dajiba Soman from Pale near Panvel proposed his daughter, Saibai, for Vasudeo. The status, personality and

horoscope of the bride decided the issue, and Vasudeo approved of Saibai for his wife without any hesitation.

According to an extant *kumkum-patrika*<sup>1</sup> Vasudeo's marriage with Saibai was celebrated at Shirdhon with due eclat in the winter of 1859. Balvantrao had invited hundreds of his relatives and acquaintances to the marriage of his eldest son. The two lengthy lists of invitees out of the many, at present with the author, include the names of hundreds of guests from villages like Apte, Karade and Gulsunde, taluka towns like Kalyan, district places like Thana, Alibag and Poona and the Presidency town of Bombay. In the list of invitees from Kalyan is named Vasudeo's revered tutor of yore—Tatya Pantoji.

The guests dispersed after the marriage ceremony, and Vasudeo left for Bombay. There he secured a clerical appointment in the Audit Office of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway on a handsome salary of Rupees twenty a month. The head clerk in this office, one Balvantrao, belonging to the Bhandari caste, was not a man who could work in a spirit of co-operation with his subordinates. High-handed and petulant, he was daily accustomed to remark: "The clerks here are somehow able to carry on in this office. Nobody would offer them even five rupees a month outside!" Ever conscious of his self-respect, Vasudeo found it difficult to tolerate such outbursts of his head clerk. He had been for some time past trying for a better job and when his efforts fructified one fine morning, with the call from the new office in his pocket, he surprised his head clerk with the following farewell: "Although in your opinion I do not deserve even five rupees a month I am offered thirty rupees a month outside. Do not consider one and all of the same stamp. I do not care for your certificate, and as for my salary and allowance, I take them as already lost. That is all! Good-bye!!" With these spirited words Vasudeo bade his head clerk adieu and left the office. Vasudeo had served in this office for four months and had done some overtime work. But the Railway Company refused to pay him the part-salary and allowance for overtime work, together amounting to Rupees sixty, for leaving service without notice.

Vasudeo took up his new appointment at the Grant Medical College, one of the oldest medical institutions in India, on Rupees thirty a month, and continued in the service for over two years. Towards the end of 1862 he fell seriously ill and often became unconscious. After recovery, he left Bombay for

<sup>1</sup> The *patrika* is in *modi* script, addressed by Balvantrao to one Shree-mant Raoji Ganesh Maydeo.



a change of climate on doctor's advice. He spent many days at hill stations, and places like Wai and Satara and holy places like Pandharpur before he returned to Bombay to resume duty.

One of the influential elderly friends of Vasudeo in Bombay was Vinayakrao Paradkar who was serving in a European firm. Paradkar's official head, Mr. Johnston, was a close friend of the Head-Assistant to the Commissariat Examiner Mr. Mallins. Mr. Johnston and Mr. Mallins lived in the same bungalow. Paradkar had a friend Jagannath Visaji Pandharikar employed in the Commissariat Examiner's Office at Bombay. Pandharikar requested Paradkar to secure a recommendatory note from Mr. Johnston to Mr. Mallins for a job for his brother in the Commissariat Examiner's Office. Paradkar, however, thought that if he could help the brother of a friend in the matter, why not try it for Vasudeo, and sounded Vasudeo about his plan. Vasudeo readily agreed. All went well. Vasudeo gave up his service on hand, and joined the Commissariat Examiner's Office at Bombay on a salary of Rupees thirty a month. In the new office within two months he greatly impressed his superiors. They transferred him to Poona in 1865 with a strong recommendation for promotion, and Vasudeo left Bombay for the last time to join the Military Finance Office at Poona under the Controller of Military Accounts.

## CHAPTER IV

### MOTHER'S DEMISE

**T**HE present-day readers can scarcely have any idea of the Poona city in which Vasudeo Balvant stepped in 1865. In place of the lingering rows of the bungalows of rich men bordering its west, then extended an intricate forest from the temple of Narsimha right up to the Parvati and Fergusson College hills. After nightfall men hesitated to visit this part of the city and the locality was, therefore, best suited for meetings of secret societies.

The houses which adorn the present-day Poona are a marked contrast to their counterparts in 1865. Without any well-locked protective main doors the houses then teemed with cattle bellowing from wooden thatched sheds in the front enclosures. The houses were lighted with oil lamps instead of electric lights and the city streets had no electric lamp-posts.

The narrow streets and lanes in the city intertwined at several places and the streets were terminated with wooden gates at either end. Comfortable motor-cars of the rich were to run in the city after about half a century. The most common conveyance was the light bullock cart while phaetons and palanquins were used by the rich.

The people dressed differently from the present-day Poona citizens. White turbans or pink puggrees served as the customary headdress for grown-ups. Garments fastened with strings covered their chests, and the gaudy red Poona shoe was on the feet of the Poona gentry.

Vasudeo Balvant entered the Poona city of this pattern in 1865. He had frequently to change his residence on account of his revolutionary activities which the law-abiding house-owners disliked. He first lived in Sacheo's wada and then in the temple of Narsimha in Karkolpura for the major part of his fourteen years' stay in Poona. Lastly he resided in Thattiwale's wada in the Shukrawar Peth. This house has since changed several masters and mostly renovated is now trisected into house numbers 129, 130 and 131 Shukrawar Peth.

Vasudeo Balvant soon impressed his superiors as a conscientious and sincere worker. He drafted the official notes in pearl-like beautiful characters in English and Marathi alike, rose in

the estimation of his superiors and earned quick promotions until within four years he began to draw a monthly salary of Rupees sixty!<sup>1</sup>

A deeply religious temperament lured Vasudeo Balvant into constant meditation and life of renunciation. He loved to search for the known and the unknowable and craved for the *siddhi*. Under the patronage of a learned priest Vinayakbhat Vaze, residing in the temple of Narsimha, he received scholarly instruction in ancient scriptures and Brahminical *mantras* including *Sandhya*, *Purushasukta*, *Rudra* and *Pavamana*. He also made a special study of Sanskrit. He was often engrossed in prolonged prayers to his chief deity Shree Datta. His mind was full of holy thoughts, and because of his moody behaviour people wondered whether his mental balance was not lost.

After two years, the wife of Vasudeo Balvant gave birth to his first and only son. But their joy over the event was short-lived as the child breathed its last when only two months old. Vasudeo Balvant had no male issue thereafter, but only a daughter, named Mathutai, by this wife. She survived her father for many years.

Vasudeo Balvant went to meet many saints in search of the divine truth. The biographer of the famous Swami Maharaj of Akkalkot who was held in high esteem by a large number of devotees records one such visit. Says he: "The famous rebel Vasudeo Balvant Phadke while in service at Poona came twice or thrice on leave to see the Maharaj. Without, however, revealing the object of his visit he prayed the Maharaj in silence. The omniscient Samarth knew his object. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

All these efforts, however, brought Vasudeo Balvant no mental rest, and after five years of mental perturbation, in 1870, a momentous event gave a revolutionary turn to his life. He received a message that his mother, Saraswatibai, was seriously ill at Shirdhon, and that he should run down to her bedside post-haste. Mother's love being supreme in his heart, Vasudeo Balvant submitted an urgent application for leave to his office and awaited its grant by the authorities. The official red-tapism as usual, however, delayed the disposal of the application and the leave also was ultimately refused to him.

<sup>1</sup> " . . . This man we are informed was for a long time a trusted and a pampered clerk in the office of the Military Finance Department."—The *Deccan Herald*, July 6, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> G. B. Mulekar, *Life of the Swami Maharaj of Akkalkot* (Marathi), pp. 74-75.

The refusal infuriated Vasudeo Balvant. For although he had taken up service he was not made to be a mere quill-driver, and had not forsaken higher ideals. He, therefore, decided to challenge the official procedure and arbitrary decision, sent an intimation to the office about his departure for Shirdhon, and left Poona by the first available train for Karjat. Detraining in distress at Karjat, he hastened to Shirdhon over hills and dales, fields and rivers, and reached the village post with sweet remembrances of his mother revolving in his mind. He darted towards his house through the main dusty street and appeared in the porch of his mansion. Hardly had he entered the porch when he heard the shocking news which made him swoon with a pathetic cry after his mother!

His mother had departed this world without a parting look at him. Motionless with excitement and grief, he cursed the British officers who had delayed his arrival at Shirdhon, and resolved to wreck his vengeance on the foreigners as a whole. Recalling the memories of his mother, wide awake most of the night, he wept bitterly until at last tired and exhausted he sobbed himself to sleep.

In the same melancholy mood he returned to Poona. He lashed out an angry petition against the officers concerned to the Bombay Government, demanding a detailed enquiry into the incident and insisting that the defaulting officers should be brought to book. On enquiry the Government found that the complaint was just and so blamed the officers for their conduct. But the Government did not openly reprimand them, lest other clerks should gather courage to make similar representations to the Government. The complaint, however, had its reaction. The Head-Assistant in his office would not speak to Vasudeo Balvant for six months!<sup>3</sup> The sad demise of his mother without his meeting her tormented Vasudeo Balvant's mind and he fell sick again for three months during the year.<sup>4</sup>

Next year, at the time of the death anniversary of his mother also, Vasudeo Balvant did not get the necessary leave for performing her *Shraddha* ceremony, and this only reinforced his resolve to avenge the injustice. "I'll get a new world for me; but where can I get a new mother?" he said to himself, and got embittered against the British administration in India. The

<sup>3</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

<sup>4</sup> Vasudeo Balvant's Service Book had recorded 94 days' sick leave in 1870.—J.D. Vol. 58-59 of 1879-80, Government of Bombay.

glitter of the silver chains of service lost its charm for him. The dull monotony and the soulless discipline of his office dominated by the foreigners completely antagonised him towards the British Government, and he commenced maturing plans to carry out his resolve and strive for political independence of India.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NEW SPIRIT

THE resolve of Vasudeo Balvant to rise in revolt against the British Government found justification and encouragement in the changing political situation in the Deccan from 1870.

The first political front of popular agitation in India was opened in Poona by the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (People's Organisation) in 1870. Founded with such an innocuous object as that of ending the mismanagement in the administration of Parvati temple in Poona, the Sabha soon attained the importance of the premier political institution in the country, and provided a platform for constitutional agitators in the Deccan wielding extensive influence in Poona and Maharashtra. So much so that the late Lokamanya Tilak spent the early years of his public life in capturing it. It mainly functioned under the guidance of Madhavrao Ranade. But another great Indian carried on its activities in day-to-day life. He was none other than the late Mr. Ganesh Vasudeo Joshi. His devotion to the Sarvajanik Sabha made his name synonymous with that of the Sabha and people called him "Sarvajanik Kaka". On the wrong side of forty, Kaka was full of enthusiasm for public service. Engrossed in thoughts about public grievances every moment of the day, he walked along Poona streets with his steps keeping pace with the speed of the thoughts in his mind. He had erected a temple of Lord Vishnu in Poona to shelter the homeless and with the co-operation of his wife had started an organisation called "Stree-Vicharavati Sabha" for promoting the welfare of women. At first he served in the Poona law court; but was suspended on a charge of dereliction of duty. During subsequent enquiry, however, he was absolved of all blame. He thus emerged unscathed from the ordeal but declined to continue in service, and burning the midnight oil in studying law, eventually secured the *sanad* of a pleader in the Poona law court. He built up a good practice at the bar. But prosperity did not damp his enthusiasm for public service. His unfailing assistance to people in need endeared him to the rich as well as the poor.

Ranade was transferred to Poona in 1871, and his close guidance strengthened the hands of Sarvajanik Kaka. Ranade had a unique knack of moving the pieces on the political chess-

board from behind the curtain, and his lead which Tilak characterised as "yeoman service to the country which generated sufficient warmth and infused new life in the cold inert mass that Maharashtra was at that time",<sup>1</sup> shaped the public opinion for years hereafter.

Ranade enthused the people with a new spirit of introspection and moulded their thought with a novel philosophy. He aimed at regaining our past prosperity; but strangely enough through the benefaction of the British. He never persuaded himself to bear any animosity against the British rule. In fact he propounded the cursed theory of "Divine Dispensation" in regard to our contact with the British and considered it a blessing. This faith was repugnant to nationalists, and it never touched even the fringe of revolutionary concepts of political freedom. But he undoubtedly focussed public attention on the indispensability of giving a reorientation to our thoughts and aspirations in those times.

Ranade delivered his first speech at Poona on "National Trade" in the month of December 1872. With statistical evidence and analysis he laid bare the national loss sustained by India because of indiscriminate and unrestrained use of foreign goods. His learned discourse attracted a large number of youths of his age, amongst them Vasudeo Balvant. The heart-rending exploitation of India by foreigners and the figures of huge profits made by foreign businessmen in trade with India, lucidly and authoritatively pointed out by Ranade shocked his listeners.

Hardly had the wave of popular consciousness created by this speech faded away when, in the month of February 1873, Ranade delivered another speech at a crowded meeting in Poona. In this speech he exhorted the Indians to devote their energies to national progress.

He said: "We use the diverse things of comfort and taste produced by the machine in England. It is, however, a tragedy that our rich country cannot produce all these fine goods within its boundaries. . . .

"It is an unwelcome state of affairs that day by day our country is becoming a disabled nation looking for help to foreign quarters." <sup>2</sup>

Ranade and Sarvajani Kaka both belonged to the moderate school of politics. The resolution of the Sabha in 1874, how-

<sup>1</sup> Obituary on Mr. Justice Ranade by Lokamanya Tilak, *The Kesari*, January 22, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. N. R. Phatak, *Life of Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade* (Marathi), pp. 199-200.

ever, which demanded that India should have its representatives in the British Parliament and that the administration of India should be carried on in consultation with them, as also the foregoing excerpts, demonstrate how extremist, at times, is even the moderation of the Mahrattas !

When Vasudeo Balvant set himself to work for the amelioration of the condition of his countrymen in 1872,<sup>3</sup> there was a complete void in the political field in India without any previous political agitation for Swaraj.

Ranade had not as yet begun to preach his politics in its most effective form. He emerged into real prominence only after Vasudeo Balvant had fought and fallen for Swaraj in 1879, and then too as an advocate of social reform, literacy and only mild though ceaseless appeals for political reforms, completely free from any inherent dislike of foreign rulers.

Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, the first fiery journalist actuated by intense patriotism in all his writings, was five years younger than Vasudeo Balvant. He had also not yet started his tirade against the obsequiousness and servile mentality of educated Indians, who were ever inclined to eulogise everything European and to despise everything Indian, through the columns of his monthly called *Nibandhamala*. The *Nibandhamala* was started in 1874. It came to have the force of the organ of a strong political current almost after Vasudeo Balvant's revolt was over in 1879. Besides, Chiplunkar's campaign only shaped the thoughts of his generation. It did not involve any action till 1880 when he started his independent English school.

Tilak's public career commenced only in 1880. When it is remembered that he was the first Indian leader to organise an active political movement against the British Government years thereafter, the complete void in the political field in 1872 can be well imagined.

The terror of the Government persecution befalling an "offender", who dared nourish any thoughts of Swaraj, would be clear from its savage severity as late as 1882 or 1897 and afterwards. The victim thrown in imprisonment during the period would travel fast to his doom in a matter of few months.<sup>4</sup>

Tilak and Agarkar were lodged in Dongri Jail in 1882 with a sentence of four months' imprisonment in the Kolhapur De-

\* "I have been all along for seven years considering how I could save the lives of the poor, who are dying of starvation and are reduced to skeletons."—Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant, written in 1879.

<sup>4</sup> Sakharam Gorhe, an accused in the Nasik Conspiracy Case, complained of severe police torture before the High Court in 1910. He died in jail within a few months.—Veer Savarkar, *An Echo from Andamans*, p. 22.



wan Defamation Case. Within a few days Tilak lost twenty-four pounds and Agarkar sixteen on account of the poor food which they got and the unbearable conditions of their prison life.<sup>5</sup> In 1897 Tilak was sentenced to eighteen months' rigorous imprisonment in the first sedition trial. The bad and meagre food in the jail took a toll of twenty-five pounds of his weight in a few months. His lips literally turned black and throat got swollen and dried up.<sup>6</sup>

Often the victim would be tortured and persecuted to such an extent that he would come out of the jail with shattered health and deleterious effect leading to derangement. Once outside, he would witness his close relatives deprived of their means of livelihood, shunned by acquaintances and dogged by detectives for an indefinite period.<sup>7</sup>

If this was the fate of the patriots in 1897 or 1910 the severity of the Government persecution in 1872 is anybody's guess. It was in such times that Vasudeo Balvant ventured to work and fight for independence.

The speeches of Ranade coincided with the beginning of the public life of Vasudeo Balvant, and added fuel to the burning fire of patriotism in his heart. Both of them were almost contemporaries, Ranade being older than Vasudeo Balvant by only about three years. Both detested the exploitation of India under foreign rule. But they differed in political ideology. Ranade's remedy for the national malaise remained confined to prayers and petitions to the British Government while that of Vasudeo Balvant found expression in immediate armed revolt against the British Government. They thus represented two distinct schools of political thought followed by successive generations of Indians till the country became free. Ranade was the father of constitutionalism; Vasudeo Balvant the apostle of revolutionary ideology in Indian politics.

The exploitation and economic drain of India under British rule attracted the attention of Vasudeo Balvant also. "Scarcely had the clothes of Indian manufacture," he says, "begun to get into demand when the British Government opened an appoint-

<sup>5</sup> G. G. Agarkar, *A Hundred and One Days of Ours in Dongri Jail* (Marathi), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> N. C. Kelkar, *Life of Lokamanya Tilak* (Marathi), Vol. I, p. 604.

<sup>7</sup> The story of Yashoda Vahini, elder sister-in-law of Savarkar when he was in England, is too well known. She had to live in a cemetery in 1909 as nobody would give her shelter, when her husband was sent to jail and younger brother-in-law was also arrested in connection with a political offence! She died in 1919 without meeting her husband, who was later on transported to the Andamans as a political life-convict, after waiting for permission to meet him for ten long years.

ment for a European in the Viceregal Legislative Council at Calcutta on a salary of Rupees five thousand a month. This new officer only removed the duty on cloth of English manufacture! . . . The number of districts was increased from fourteen to twenty-one; the number would still increase. This meant that seven new Collectors and seven new Judges with more than two thousand rupees as monthly salary also came to be appointed."<sup>8</sup>

An organisation called the "Aikyavardhini" (organisation promoting unity) was started about this time in Poona by some youths, and its Sunday meetings used to go in session in a house near the temple of Lord Vishnu in the city. Vasudeo Balvant was an active member of this organisation from the outset. At the meetings of this organisation were discussed ways and means of promoting the national uplift of India.<sup>9</sup>

The new spirit in the political atmosphere activated the grown-up Indian generation. In the month of January 1873, Sarvajani Kaka took a vow to use exclusively Swadeshi goods, and started a trade concern to encourage Swadeshi. Clothes of coarse hand-spun *khaddar* first appeared in India on the person of Sarvajani Kaka as far back as 1873 as part of a national vow. The dramatic transformation in Kaka thrilled his close associates, and its effect on youths like Vasudeo Balvant was instantaneous. Vasudeo Balvant completely discarded the use of foreign cloth and foreign goods. He was fond of white clothes and so now wore a white *khaddar* turban and upper-garment over a white Swadeshi dhoti. Later-day Indian revolutionaries always considered it a sin to use foreign goods. Vasudeo Balvant first personified this faith of the Indian revolutionaries. He took a vow to use exclusively Swadeshi goods, and also prevailed upon his colleagues to follow his example.<sup>10</sup> Vasudeo Balvant hated foreign goods and hated most British goods. And this hatred of his was very deep-rooted. It so happened one day that on reaching his office he found a quill pen of English make on his table. Within a moment he hurled it out of the window; for he always used an Indian reed for a pen as part of the above vow.

The private life of Vasudeo Balvant was shorn of its charm

<sup>8</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

<sup>9</sup> Reminiscences about Vasudeo Balvant, by the late Ganpatrao Ghotavadekar, narrated by his nephew.

<sup>10</sup> ". . . There is a section in Poona, of Brahmins, who have bound themselves by a vow never to purchase or use an article of British produce. Wassudev Balvant was one of these. And those who knew him in the Finance Office say he religiously kept his vow."—The *Bombay Gazette*, June 26, 1879.

during this year with the lamentable death of his wife after a short illness. She died leaving behind their only daughter—Mathutai. He was much distressed by the bereavement; but faced the calamity with dignity and courage.

Fathers of young brides began to enquire of him whether he was thinking of getting married again. He was twenty-eight and a second marriage at this age by one who had lost his wife was not unusual in those days. He had also to give up the thought of continuing a widower, for there was nobody else to look after his orphaned child in later life. So when the learned Pandit of Padghavli, Kashinathshastri Kunte, proposed his daughter Godubai to him he approved of her, and stripped of all the paraphernalia of a festive marriage ceremony, 9-year-old Godubai was married to Vasudeo Balvant according to orthodox Hindu rites. The marriage took place at Shirdhon in 1873. After marriage, the name of the bride was changed to Gopikabai. Rejoicing to have had a rich home for his daughter, Kashinathshastri died after five years, leaving Godubai to face the persecution and suspicion of the British Government during the revolt of his son-in-law. Gopikabai Phadke is since known to history as Baisaheb Phadke.

Vasudeo Balvant resumed his married life in his residential apartments in the temple of Narsimha at Poona. His three younger brothers—Krishna, Pandurang and Gangadhar—also lived with him for education. His excited mood before the revolt created a formidable problem for Baisaheb while conducting the household. Her husband's salary bent under liabilities of his political commitments left slender resources for domestic requirements. Bai, however, handled the problem with remarkable ability. Averse to harping on grievances, she faced the task ungrudgingly amidst provocative circumstances. She banished all desire for ornaments or thought about personal needs from her mind, and won the admiration of her husband by her selflessness.

Vasudeo Balvant highly appreciated his wife's good qualities. He was of progressive views in the matter of women's education although it was not popular in those times. He ardently wished that Bai should be literate, and at times taught her lessons along with his brothers. Bai consequently learnt the three R's, memorised Sanskrit scriptures and could recite the *Amarkosh* with ease. She also acted as a reader to her husband in scanning the daily newspapers.

An adept in wielding arms, Vasudeo Balvant also trained his

wife in horse-riding, target practice and feats of a straight sword. He often made her fire a gun in the rear compound of the house in the evening when he returned home from office.<sup>11</sup> Bai was possibly the first Indian woman in recent history to attain proficiency in handling weapons and firearms.

Bai's difficulties in managing the household increased with her husband's widening revolutionary plans. His novel religious vows also subjected her arrangements to exacting tests every day, and she had to strain every nerve to satisfy her husband in his many embarrassing moods and during his many interrogations over domestic matters.

Shree Datta was the tutelary deity of Vasudeo Balvant. When agitated, he found solace in offering prayers to the deity. A picture of Shree Datta in a unique appearance named Shreepad Vallabha, in which the serene look usually perceived in the deity's more widely known appearance is replaced by a stern countenance, was specially got drawn by him on a sheet rendered proof against the whiteants by chemical process. This picture hung from the wall of his prayer-room. He did not take either food or water without worshipping the deity and reciting a few verses from the sacred *Gurucharitra* (Life of Shree Datta). On account of his great devotion to Shree Datta he also purchased a silver *Samputa*—a beautiful silver casket—for keeping the tiny *padukas* of Shree Datta. The casket was not bigger than the palm of a man's hand and had a tight cover. It could be easily carried by him while travelling from place to place, tucked up in the fold of his dhoti at the waist. Vasudeo Balvant worshipped the *padukas* even while on tour in a few minutes.

With labour of endless days he also prepared a manuscript of the *Gurucharitra* in copy hand. The photostat of a specimen page of the manuscript appears elsewhere in this book. This work engaged him for several months.

The art of printing was then still in its infancy, and the publication of a book entailed a great strain by way of a publisher's labour and purse. Despite these difficulties Vasudeo Balvant published a book on Shree Datta with a genuine desire for its circulation among the people. His first and only publication of this nature was entitled *Dattalahari* (Lyrics to Shree Datta). It was a translation in Marathi of the original Sanskrit work of that name. It contained a hundred and two verses extending over fifty pages and was out in 1873. Every copy of the book bore the signature of Vasudeo Balvant.

<sup>11</sup> Vasudeo Balvant had a licence for firearms.

It was a rare joy for the present author to find out one such copy, sanctified by the touch of the patriot, after so many years.

The years following the above publication were a period of distress, drought and unrest in the country. Those who were remotely suspected of cherishing national aspirations had to face the hostility and threats of the Government. The fearlessness and sense of duty displayed by the Sarvajanik Sabha during the period were so startling that until the whole mystery of the rising of Vasudeo Balvant was unravelled partisans of the Government went on accusing the Sabha of instigating the revolt.

## CHAPTER VI

### ASHES AND EMBERS

VASUDEO BALVANT addressed himself to the task of lifting the nation from the abyss of foreign bondage through instruction and organisation. The Government schools were over-academic and subservient to Government whims and dictates. Convinced of the necessity of patriotic national education, Vasudeo Balvant founded the first non-Government independent school in Poona in 1874 under the auspices of "The Poona Native Institution", of which he was the first Secretary and Treasurer. The school had its humble birth in an old building in Tapkir Galli; but it soon attained great popularity, and popularly known as Bhawe School, it is at present one of the oldest schools in India with many sister institutions. Chiplunkar and Tilak started the New English School a few years afterwards. The former school, therefore, chronologically comes first. Vasudeo Balvant's extremist views in politics were an eyesore to "thoughtful" parents. Interested people tried to induce such parents not to send their children to the school, by spreading rumours calculated to lower the reputation of the school. Vasudeo Balvant had, therefore, to issue a public statement to repudiate such allegations against the school, so that the public should not be swayed by the mischievous propaganda. The statement was penned in old Marathi and read in part: "... The school has on its staff highly experienced teachers to teach Sanskrit, Latin, Persian or Marathi, and English to students studying up to the Matriculation class. It is well established and there is excellent supervision over the students in the school to see whether they study attentively in the school or unnecessarily absent themselves without the knowledge of their parents or prepare the lessons with diligence or not. This will be evident to the public from the quarterly reports of the school. It is at present held at Kibe Wada in old Tapkir Galli. Several teachers from other schools have been found trying to prejudice the students against this school under various garbs in order to dissuade them from joining the school. But it is not proper on their part to do so."

Vasudeo Balvant Phadke  
Secretary and Treasurer,  
Poona Native Institution.<sup>1</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant also threw himself heart and soul in organising public opinion in favour of Indian independence. A clerk by calling, he was fully conscious of the ills of Indians in the services and India's exploitation in that sphere. The lion's share of high-salaried posts was monopolised by Europeans while the "natives", as the Europeans contemptuously called the Indians, lived on low-paid jobs. He was surprised at the Indians who were oblivious of this injustice. Tearing to shreds the profession of the British that "natives" were also appointed to high Government posts, he says: "One Indian is to be appointed to a high position and the newspapers trumpet that many appointments are being given to Indians. If a (European) military officer does long and meritorious service in India he is paid Rs. 75,000 as gratuity on his retirement. Why does he get this large amount? By law! Their law is a mint coining money. A military officer draws in addition to the salary, Rs. 800 to Rs. 1,000 a month for a Staff Appointment, the duties of which he executes in the shade! Whose is this money? Is this their father's money? Their external policy is generous, internal treacherous. There are thousands of examples of such deception. Has anybody ever taken the trouble of enquiring about it?"<sup>2</sup>

With considerable industry Vasudeo Balvant marshalled unassailable facts of such deceptions of the British and unmasked them in his utterances. He visited distant places at week-ends, spent the holiday on Sundays in propagating his views, and resumed his duty on the next working day as usual. Propaganda tours, which have been the feature of modern Indian leadership, were first utilised in the Indian freedom movement by Vasudeo Balvant. He first delivered speeches in Poona and then at Panvel, Palaspe, Tasgaon and Narsobachi Wadi. He himself broadcast the announcement of his public speeches in Poona by the beat of a *thala* with a rod. "All should come to the Shanwarwada grounds this evening," he said. "Our country

<sup>1</sup> Condensed from the original statement published in an old Marathi journal the *Dnyanachakshu*, November 4, 1874. The issue was in a tattered condition when it came to the author's hands.

<sup>2</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

must be free. The English must be driven out. The ways and means of doing it, I'll explain in my speech."<sup>3</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant rose to great emotional heights of patriotism while addressing his audiences. His sonorous voice and mesmerising personality held his audiences spellbound. His speeches were replete with patriotic fervour, and displayed a great dislike for the British rulers. He vehemently denounced the humiliating insults heaped on India by its foreign masters. Vasudeo Balvant was no bookish Pandit and weighty dissertations had no use for him. Simple diction and straight arguments sustained his addresses, and created a yearning for national freedom in the hearts of his listeners. The patriotic urge in his thesis invested his utterances with a charm at once brave and captivating. His speeches were a precious treasure for youths. They copied them out and committed them to memory. Vasudeo Balvant bluntly warned his countrymen: "Your ills will not disappear without Independence and Swaraj for your country!" The lofty walls of Shanwarwada have listened to the inspiring speeches of great patriots. They have also heard the first of these patriots proclaiming India's goal of complete freedom.

While agitating and organising the people for the struggle for freedom Vasudeo Balvant disliked to patiently wait for the rising storm. He was eager to see the immediate conflagration of a national revolution. After delivering many speeches at different places he was disappointed to find that there was not any appreciable number of souls prepared to do and die, and became despondent about awakening the people to rise and act through this channel. He asked himself: "The people are not prepared to rise in revolt. Is the British rule then to continue over us for ever?"

As he thus groped in the dark India had a glimpse of British ruthlessness against anyone who dared to challenge the British overlordship. Maharaj Malharrao Gaekwar of Baroda was, for some time past, not on good terms with his British Resident Col. Phayre. He was maliciously charged by the British Government in 1874 with attempting to poison his Resident and was deposed in 1875. The Government appointed an Inquiry Commission to investigate the charges. Its proceedings lingered on for many days and although the charges against the Maharaja failed, the Government did not restore him to his *gadi*.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs of Baisaheb Phadke, by her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Umabai Phadke.



During the inquiry the Sarvajanik Sabha had offered to finance the defence of the Maharaja. And by so doing it antagonised the Government.

The abdication symbolised only one phase of persistent British outrage on Indian self-respect and patriotism; for the Resident had also accused the Maharaja of encouraging seditious trends in the Deccan. And this reason was probably the decisive consideration which weighed with the British Government in ousting the Maharaja from his *gadi* in 1875. Because of such events Vasudeo Balvant's conviction about India's helplessness in accomplishing the goal of independence by constitutional means became stronger. He formally attended the functions of the Sarvajanik Sabha; but had no heart in them as before.

The troubled times in Maharashtra received fresh impetus in the following year when riots broke out in the Deccan. They were started by the indebted ryots against the money-lenders and are known as the Deccan riots. But the damage caused by them paled into insignificance before the havoc wrought by the great devastating famine of 1876-77 in the Deccan. Readers recollecting the tragic accounts of the great Bengal famine of 1943 would be able to imagine the destruction of life caused by a similar famine in 1876-77 in India when speedy means of transport did not exist and the alien Government was even more apathetic to the welfare of the Indian people.

The entire famine-stricken Deccan turned into a veritable Sahara. Parched-up fields and sun-dried shrubs extended over the whole of the Deccan. Brooks went dry without water. Dry hot winds blew over lakes and fountains. The region was transformed into a vast waste land.

The poor village peasantry stood on the verge of death by starvation. Human will to live yet was supreme in the hungry souls, and huge hunger marches from the famine-stricken countryside crawled over to the cities in search of food; but there also the peasants met with drought and disappointment. In the process, they were obliged to sell their lean dying cattle at negligible price in city bazaars. Many of them died on their way to the cities.

Epidemics of cholera and smallpox broke out close on the heels of the famine and claimed an additional toll of life.

The figures of death due to starvation and disease were staggering, and fully exposed "the peace and prosperity" existing in India under the British rule. In the districts of Bijapur and Sholapur alone the death roll during the famine rose to over seven thousand. Epidemics and diseases claimed

another four thousand lives.<sup>4</sup> Never was such destruction of human life witnessed by India in the past.

The Christian missionaries were ever alert to seize the opportunity to swell their ranks with converts. They succeeded in converting quite a few thousand destitute Hindu children to Christianity in return for the succour they proffered to the victims of the famine. The Poona Dharma Sabha was shocked at these conversions of Hindus and stepped in to stop the rot. It offered free shelter and food to all of them including the non-Hindu.<sup>5</sup> The offer deprived the Christian missionaries of the opportunity to convert the famine-stricken children to Christianity. For many Hindus now went to the Sabha for relief.

The following pathetic scenes in Sholapur depict the tragedy at a number of other places in the Deccan. The special correspondent of the *Times of India* wrote to his paper in November 1876: "Sholapur, Nov. 6—It is difficult to realise the distress. Yesterday twenty persons died of starvation and cholera. More than two lakhs of people have deserted the villages. . . . Through the city about twenty-five thousand people have passed to the Nizam's Dominions. Grain-looting is becoming very common. . . . Two little children died in Mr. Grant's house. The Bishop proposes to start an orphanage at Poona; but on the condition of the children being Christianised. Seven hundred cattle were wilfully deserted in the mill compound, and ten thousand are expected at the market tomorrow."

"Sholapur, Nov. 8—A little sister aged six died this morning. Last night a Mahar woman died of starvation. . . . Close to my bungalow a man having fallen from sheer exhaustion on the road knocked out (his) front teeth."

Vasudeo Balvant read the harrowing tales of these privations of his countrymen, and was beside himself with indignation as no energetic measures were taken by the "civilised and enlightened" British Government to combat the calamity. For what steps did the Government take to alleviate the sufferings of its subjects in India? Sir Richard Temple, the Governor of Bombay, adopted in the Deccan the demonstrative and face-saving tactics of the British Viceroy Lord Lytton at Calcutta. He started famine works and imported only enough foodgrains to enable him to advertise Government's incessant efforts to combat the famine. The famine works opened by him attracted only a small number of labourers; for only a few stout ones

<sup>4</sup> The *Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajani Sabha*, October 1878, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> The *Native Opinion*, November 12, 1876.

had survived to take up the work. Sir Richard exacted very strenuous labour from them. For this work they were given the generous wages of half a seer of grain per man ordered by the calculating brain of Sir Richard Temple. The help was roundly condemned by the people as a mockery of Government assistance. Some enduring labourers managed to subsist on the meagre rations at least for some days, and those who could not, embraced eternal rest under the protecting shield of the British Raj!

Unable to remain unconcerned when his countrymen were in the throes of death, Vasudeo Balvant went on long leave on grounds of ill health<sup>6</sup> with the intention of touring the country in person to study the plight of his people at first-hand. He marched on foot, and travelled far and wide disguised as a *sannyasi*. He grew his beard and packed his paltry luggage in a wallet. In the course of his tour he visited far-off capitals like Indore, Ujjain, Nagpur and Baroda, and then travelled through Khandesh up to Nasik, Sangli, Miraj and Kolhapur. It was a melancholy journey through the country ravaged by famine with deserted villages and temples and long tracts of desolate land.

Vasudeo Balvant made many kind enquiries of the starved men, women and children. They narrated their tales of woe to him in a faltering voice. He thrust his hand in his wallet, and distributed among them whatever coins came to his hand. A drop in the ocean! But the act symbolised the sympathy of his agonised soul.

Colonialism and connivance at conversions in the early days were the distinctive features of the British rule in India. The exploitation of India in services and the poverty and economic drain of India under British rule were the direct results of this colonialism. Vasudeo Balvant was one of the first few men of fame in India to spotlight these features of British rule.

Vasudeo Balvant also touched the problem of food scarcity which has been threatening India till today. Pointing out how the British Government starved India of irrigation projects and created an artificial famine of food in this country, he says: "Here, cultivation is made by canal water, and had the Government freely supplied this water and food to our men for two months, the harvest would have been prosperous and lasted the people for one year; there would have been no necessity of importing foodgrains, and my countrymen would not have died

<sup>6</sup> Vasudeo Balvant's Service Book showed that he had 58 days' sick leave in 1876.—J.D. Volume 58-59 of 1879-80, Government of Bombay.

of starvation. The Government, however, assumes a false colour of charity by saying that it saves the people by importing foodgrains for them, and then on the ground that great expenses have been incurred by the State in adopting measures to free the people from starvation, imposes fresh taxes on the people!" He frankly asks: "Now what does all this mean? It only means to gather money, colonise this country and destroy the religion." <sup>7</sup> Vasudeo Balvant thus laid bare the basic theme of the British policy of colonialism in India which was the main target of attack by all nationalist leaders of this country for subsequent sixty-eight years until India became free.

The holocaust of famine that stalked through the land finally confirmed Vasudeo Balvant in his resolve to immediately rise in an armed revolt for the sake of Swaraj. For how many years would glide by before any appreciable number of people came forward for the battle of freedom as a result of constitutional agitation? What effect had his speeches on the people? he asked himself. To quote his words, "the speeches had no more effect on the minds of the people than the sprinkling of water on leaves has on the life of the tree." <sup>7</sup>

His contacts with the Sarvajanik Sabha were too intimate for speedy liquidation. But his enthusiasm for its programmes had died down. When its functions went on at the Nagarkar wada Vasudeo Balvant was now seen engaged in talks aside with his friends. He openly doubted, on such occasions, the country's ability to usher in better days for its people through speechifying and writing articles in the press. He defiantly asked: "Who ever got independence without a war? without an armed revolt?" His listeners exclaimed: "Armed revolt? Then we must be prepared to lose our lives in the attempt."

Thereupon, Vasudeo Balvant warmed up and said: "Most of us Indians are fools. Nothing can be expected of them. They want immediate gain. But they are not prepared for patient work. When asked to give assistance, they would ask in return: 'Yes! But how can this be done? If our acts come to light we would lose our lives. We would be glad if the pretentious regime of the English is destroyed. But do not ask us for money or assistance!'" <sup>8</sup>

The philosophy of armed revolt followed by Vasudeo Balvant can be traced to the traditional spirit of revolt instilled into the Mahrattas by their peculiar natural surroundings. Sir Richard Temple judged it correctly when he said: "If it be

<sup>7</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

that national character is formed partly by physical surroundings, climate and scenery, partly also by historical associations, then anyone who sees the Deccan and reads its history will not have far to go in order to discover the reasons why the political tendencies there demand vigilance on the part of the British Government." <sup>9</sup>

The natural surroundings with forts, mountains and rivers around Poona breathed the spirit of independence in the ears of Vasudeo Balvant. "Had not Shivaji unfurled his standard of revolt in this very region? With what insignificant start and with what splendid success in the end?" he thought and, therefore, selected this very region for his activities. His revolutionary ways were unpalatable to educated classes, and so he diverted his attention to the masses. They included the sturdy race of the Ramoshis in the districts of Poona and Satara, possessing immense hardihood and death-defying loyalty to their master. They numbered thousands in the territory, and took pride in calling themselves "Rama-vamshi" (descendants of Ram) and hence Ramoshis. The trusted emissaries of Vasudeo Balvant roamed about amongst these people and bound them over to their cause by word of honour. The Ramoshis valued their word more than their life, and Vasudeo Balvant intended to utilise this loyalty of the Ramoshis for the national purpose. Vasudeo Balvant's lieutenants also contacted the Kolis, Bhils and Dhangars (shepherds) in the districts of Khandesh and Nasik as also Berar, and enlisted their support for the revolt.

These men lived in simple huts. Under the Mahratta rule, they commanded the forts. But the advent of British rule deprived them of these offices. They were now employed by wealthy people to guard their estates. Disaffected against the British rule on account of the loss of the fort-commands, they were further embittered when starvation visited them during the terrible famine. Their by-occupation of felling trees and selling faggot in the cities received a setback when new forest laws prohibited cutting of wood by them without permission and necessary payment to Government. They used to have free graze for their cattle in the forest. But the Government now prohibited it under new laws. This increased their burden of maintaining the cattle. They were also detained and tortured by the police during the troubled days of the Deccan riots. These privations and persecutions had transformed these men into a violent anti-Government bloc.

<sup>9</sup> Sir Richard Temple, *Men and Events of my Time in India*. p. 469.

And upon this multitude full of frustrated and explosive minds Vasudeo Balvant descended in 1877. He first mesmerised the Ramoshis with his personal charm, and then fully exploited their virtuous traits for his cause. He presented them with turbans and gave them liquor. He distributed money among them and gave them dinners, binding them with pledges of loyalty to his person. To them a cultured high-caste Brahmin like Vasudeo Balvant unreservedly rubbing shoulders with them was a unique experience, and his kind enquiry and words of assurance and earnestness induced them to look upon him as their benefactor. Vasudeo Balvant told them that the cause of their miseries was the loss of Swaraj, and warned them against expecting better days until the curse of foreign rule was wiped out from India. His diction was racy with the soil. His outspoken analysis of their miseries incited the Ramoshi minds and men against the British Government, and prepared them to follow him as the man of the hour.

The movements of Vasudeo Balvant went on in a secret manner while he was still in Government service. After about one year the response of the Ramoshis to his appeals strengthened his self-confidence. During this period, when once he had a talk with his companions about his plan of revolt, some of them asked him : " But how could this be done ? "

In the excitement caused by his preparations for the revolt Vasudeo Balvant said to them : " Ye, fools ! I will show it to you one day. I will show you how to set the things right in a minute ! "

Vasudeo Balvant took leave for three months<sup>10</sup> and toured the entire Deccan. He also visited places beyond the Deccan. It was probably during this tour that " he approached all the native States in and beyond the Deccan " <sup>11</sup> for help. But how could the native princes and that too in those times when the British Government did not connive at possible anti-Government move from any quarter, much less from an Indian State, dare assist him ? It is possible that the more rebellious amongst them had sympathy for his cause; but still they would not act in a way which would endanger their own lives and threaten the security of their thrones. They must, therefore, have sent

<sup>10</sup> Vasudeo Balvant's Service Book showed that he was absent on leave on private affairs from 9th December 1877 to 10th March 1878.—J.D. Volume 58-59 of 1879-80, Government of Bombay.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* " Wassudeo said that he had been to Indore, had an audience with H.H. The Maharaj Holkar, and asked for his assistance. But the Holkar declined to assist."—Evidence of Rangopant Moreswar Mahajan before the Magistrate.

him away with promises of help in case his attempt showed signs of success. The contacts of Vasudeo Balvant with these States, however, show that his plans were more farflung than are generally known to be to the outside world.

Vasudeo Balvant next opened negotiations with rich people for the funds required for his rising, but in vain, although he assured them that the money was required for Swaraj, and when Swaraj came he would pay it back to them. The selfishness of the rich had made them turn down his demand. Vasudeo Balvant, therefore, paused to think: "Means do not by themselves matter. If the rich men do not voluntarily contribute to the funds for Swaraj, why not forcibly deprive them of their wealth to swell the coffers of Swaraj?" Thinking minutely and decisively in this fashion, he finalised his plans of armed swoops on the houses of rich men for the purpose, towards the beginning of 1879.

## CHAPTER VII

### SECRET ORGANISATION

To prepare himself for the revolutionary life Vasudeo Balvant spent his days in arduous exercise. He had a great fascination for the body beautiful. Two to three hundred *jors* and *namaskars* and equal number of *baithakas* became a pastime for him. His tall stout body, as hard as a stone, with massive shoulders and an expanded chest was a delightful sight for on-lookers. He was a great athlete. Gymnasiums, popularly known as *akhadas*, attracted him. He learnt novel feats of wrestling and duels in the gymnasiums. While his contemporaries enjoyed their gossips or passed evening time in merry-making, Vasudeo Balvant with his colleagues was lost in bouts in the *houda* (wrestling ring). The well-known *akhada*—Vaidya's Bag, on the site of which now stands the building of Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal at Poona and the *akhada* of Lahuji Buwa were his favourite places for learning and practising physical feats. He wielded the straight sword—*dandpatta*—with a remarkable mastery, and target-firing and horse-riding were his specialities.

Vasudeo Balvant loved to possess arms, and had always with him two or three guns, half a dozen swords, straight swords and spears in his armoury. Occasionally he had a pistol or a revolver with sufficient ammunition for the firearms.<sup>1</sup>

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, who was initially a political extremist and a staunch opponent of British rule in India, had also learnt the physical feats and received instruction in wielding of arms from Lahuji Buwa.<sup>2</sup>

"With scores of his comrades Vasudeo Balvant visited the Gultekdi hill near Poona. Holding arms like a *dandpatta* in the mouth, the youths would scale dilapidated walls with their backs and learnt the use of a *ghorpad*.<sup>3</sup> With two straight swords in two hands, they would break through a cordon of armed men around them. Vasudeo Balvant led them in jumping over tall hedges and thorny bushes grown over the ground and rode a galloping horse for shooting a moving target.

<sup>1</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

<sup>2</sup> N. C. Kelkar, *Life of Lokamanya Tilak* (Marathi), Vol. I, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> A sure-footed tenacious creature used by Shivaji's men to storm the enemy forts.



"In the moonless dark nights, he ran cross-country races, climbed up broken cliffs, dashed along river banks and swam across the rivers, acquiring the qualities necessary for an ambitious youth who desired to establish a new Raj."<sup>4</sup>

A junior member of the secret society of Vasudeo Balvant, who preferred to remain anonymous,<sup>5</sup> said that Vasudeo Balvant often left his residence after sunset and rode fast on horseback through the main streets of Poona. Many of his Sardar friends lent him their horses on such occasions. Any new weapon would attract his special attention.

About the secret organisation of the revolutionary leader, the member furnished the present author with the following account: "The organisation consisted of four groups. The first organised meetings of schoolboys without the knowledge of inquisitive teachers at secret places outside the school. The message of independence was preached to the students by spokesmen of the organisation at these meetings."

The morning processions which went about singing patriotic songs were once a feature of the nationalist movement. They were in fact started by Vasudeo Balvant in his earlier struggle. "The poems and prayers of Ramdas and Tukaram formed the main songs of the second group consisting of roving bands. During the latter part of the day preachers belonging to the third group sang satirical songs describing the pathetic plight of India. People often invited the singers to their houses for singing the songs." The fourth group was made up of active members engaged in revolutionary activities.

The youths who accepted the ideals of the society were bound by a sacred vow and initiated into the secret society. The society consisted of several secret groups and each group only knew its head. The "Nameless Chronicler" says: The pledge of the secret society was ceremoniously administered to newcomers. Taking curds and parched rice in their hands the newcomers uttered the pledge which was to the effect: 'I shall

<sup>4</sup> These details are taken from the informative article in the *Mouj*, a Marathi weekly, dated 17th July 1929, written by the late Mr. L. N. Joshi. Mr. Joshi was a well-known Marathi author, had personally seen Vasudeo Balvant, and was a member of the children's branch of the said secret society. He lived in the house opposite to the last residence of Vasudeo Balvant in Poona. The article was one of a series of articles on Vasudeo Balvant written by Mr. Joshi in the weekly.

<sup>5</sup> He preferred to remain anonymous for he was a Government pensioner, and India was not free when he narrated these reminiscences. They were, therefore, published as those of a "Nameless Chronicler" in the Marathi version of this biography. His name was Gangadhar Vishnu Joshi. He died in 1949. He had also personally seen Vasudeo Balvant, and was a member of the children's branch of the secret society.

respond to the call of my nation, sacrificing my all at the altar of my motherland.'<sup>6</sup>

"In the desolate thicket beyond the temple of Narsimha, batches of sixty to seventy youths daily collected for the training in sword exercise given by Vasudeo Balvant. They included students and teachers, Government servants and public workers." This information of the "Nameless Chronicler" is fully supported by the following replies of Keshav Ranade, the alleged incendiary of Vishrambag Wada and Budhwar Wada at Poona, to the Magistrate hearing his case :

Question : "Do you know Wasudew Balwant?"

Answer : "Yes! I do. I have known him for four years. I have been to his house on business."

Question : "When did you last see him?"

Answer : "About five months back; on the day before he disappeared, I met him in Murlidhar temple where he usually sat. There were many people present there belonging to our streets. Many were principally youths from 18 to 25 years of age. They were all more or less educated. Five or six of them knew English. They were in the habit of attending the temple where Phadkey held forth as usual on political matters, and made them go through the sword exercise with him. On the occasion in question Phadkey asked why we were content to live under British rule and why we did not mutiny and regain our lost kingdom. 'Do as I do,' he said, 'and learn to use the sword like me!' His hearers appreciated his views; but they told him that they could not do as he told them to do, for want of arms."

Two distinguished disciples headed the long list of trainees in this class. One of them was Vasudeo Balvant's second wife—Baisaheb Phadke. The account is narrated in a previous chapter. And the other and more distinguished disciple was none other than Bal Gangadhar Tilak, then in his teens, described as the father of Indian unrest afterwards by Valentine Chirol. "The youths, who daily gathered in large numbers in the rear yard of our house specialised in wielding of arms; I have seen Tilak, then a robust youth, coming to the place on so many occasions!"<sup>7</sup> so said Baisaheb in her memoirs.

Poona was then a very compact city, and almost all prominent men in the society were well known to common middle-class

<sup>6</sup> Reminiscences about Vasudeo Balvant, by "A Nameless Chronicler".

<sup>7</sup> Memoirs of Baisaheb Phadke, by her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Umabai Phadke.

people of the city. Vasudeo Balvant was a prominent personality in the field of gymnastic and physical exercises associated with anti-Government designs. It is natural that Tilak, who was so deeply anxious to build up his body as to spend one complete year in the college for the purpose should come into contact with a man so prominent in the *akhada* movement as Vasudeo Balvant.

One of the relatives of Tilak was an active participant in the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant. Tilak's biographer exclaims : "What interesting tales must Tilak have heard in his college days (about the rising of Vasudeo Balvant) from him (the relative)." <sup>a</sup>

Dr. V. M. Bhat, an accused in the Nasik Conspiracy case in 1910, has narrated the following pertinent memoir about Lokamanya Tilak, pointing to the same conclusion.

"In 1906 . . . we youths in Nasik belonged to the new political party (which proclaimed our goal of absolute political independence of India). We met Tilak in Nasik at a secret meeting. He said : 'Scanty preparation will not secure anything for us. We have tried all these measures. I tell you that the times are not yet opportune for the means you intend to adopt.' It was also revealed that Lokamanya Tilak himself had tried such (revolutionary) means in his young age !" <sup>b</sup>

The revolt of Vasudeo Balvant was the only revolutionary movement that took place when Tilak was young. And the means he is said to have tried could not but be during the rising of Vasudeo Balvant. This fact fully establishes the reliability of the memoir of Baisaheb about Tilak.

Every Thursday was a swearing-in day for the members of the organisation. But the biggest ceremony was solemnised on the Vijayadashmi day in the innermost room of the famous mansion of Sardar Raste in Poona. The main door of the mansion was guarded by vigilant office-bearers of the society. Watchful sentinels were also posted along the way from the main door to the place of the ceremony. They were instructed to raise an immediate alarm if any intruder were to force his way to the place of the ceremony, so that the arms displayed at the place could be removed from the sight of the intruder.

The eyes of the "Nameless Chronicler" had a merry twinkle as he narrated the above account. He added : "I still recall with delight our secret collection of arms on that day. It contained very few modern weapons. But it was none the less a

<sup>a</sup> N. C. Kelkar, *Life of Lokamanya Tilak* (Marathi), Vol. I, p. 83.

<sup>b</sup> *Reminiscences and Anecdotes about Lokamanya Tilak* (Marathi), compiled by S. V. Bapat, Vol. I, pp. 74-75.

marvellous sight to see. We placed wreaths of flowers on the arms and worshipped the Goddess of War! Then we said our prayers. The subject of post-prayer speeches on that day often used to be the 'Mutiny of 1857'."

"The members of our society were eager to test our preparation of war. We made the present Fergusson College hill our citadel and divided our members into rival parties to stage rehearsals of assault and defence and fought out our mock battles on the hill. Vasudeo Balvant often went to this hill or the Parvati hill with his gun, and gave long-range target practice to some of his associates."<sup>10</sup>

Prominent Indians in the Military Finance Office at Poona, and even two officers under Major Daniell, who later on led the Government forces against Vasudeo Balvant, had come under the influence of Vasudeo Balvant. Quite a few Government servants had pledged themselves to his cause, awaiting the proper moment to jump into the struggle, as indeed hundreds of others unknown are said to have done.

Vasudeo Balvant had detailed sketches and maps of the region showing the hills and hillocks, cities and villages, forts and lakes, rivers, caves and routes in the districts.

Being in the Military Finance Office, Vasudeo Balvant could contact high-placed military officers and through them arrange for the visits of some of his colleagues to places like the Sappers and Miners Regimental Headquarters on the Alandi Road,<sup>11</sup> always keeping the officers in the dark about his real purpose in these visits, which was to see the military establishments as much as possible.

The room of Vasudeo Balvant in the Thattiwale wada soon became a place of deliberations among his colleagues. A portrait of Shivaji Maharaj, the fountain-source of inspiration for many revolutionaries, decorated its wall. The plans of revolt were discussed in this room often until it was dark. The nationalist papers of the day, the *Poona Herald* and the *Dnyanachakshu* were read on such occasions. Ramoshis frequented this house, and Vasudeo Balvant openly exhorted them to rise in revolt against the Government. "Some of them agreed that they had nothing to eat and would, therefore, rise in revolt."<sup>12</sup>

Most of the income of Vasudeo Balvant was spent these days in his political activities. And in the end it was not possible

<sup>10</sup> Reminiscences about Vasudeo Balvant, by "A Nameless Chronicler".

<sup>11</sup> "Vasudeo said that many Rajput Chiefs in the army, who had two hundred men under them, were great friends of his."—Evidence of Rango-pant Moreshwar Mahajan before the Magistrate.

<sup>12</sup> Evidence of Balaji Narayan in Dhamari "dacoity" case.

for him to keep his two younger brothers with him for education. Nor could he spare any money for his father who was at Shirdhon. Relations between father and son were consequently strained. They ceased to write to each other. His younger brother Krishna, who resided in Bombay, however, maintained cordial relations with him till the last.

Still craving for divine blessings for the cause, Vasudeo Balvant again went to meet the Swami Maharaj of Akkalkot. "Placing his sword in front of the Maharaj, he bowed down to him and went and occupied a place at a distance. His object was that the Maharaj should give the sword to him with his own hands, and he should become victorious with that blessed sword." Narrating the account of the meeting the biographer of the Maharaj proceeds to say: "But the omniscient Swami called out one of his servants, handed over the sword to him and told him to keep it on a tree nearby. The servant did accordingly. Phadke waited for a long time; but the Maharaj did not present the sword to him. Vasudeorao, thereupon, took away the sword from over the tree and went back to Poona quite disappointed."<sup>13</sup>

With the same spiritual fervour Vasudeo Balvant also embarked on his second contemplated publication. It was the life-story of Shree Datta and entitled "Datta-Mahatmya-Grantha". He completed its manuscript with great labour in bold beautiful characters. It comprised five hundred and eighteen foolscap pages folded lengthwise. Its last page concluded: "This book is written with the intention of establishing religion on earth by Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, resident of Shirdhon . . . and was completed on the morning of the sixth day of Kartik, Krishna Paksha, in the Hindu year 1800 (November 1878)." This huge labour speaks volumes for Vasudeo Balvant's devotion to Shree Datta. It appears, however, that being preoccupied with the preparation of his revolt, which broke out within a few months, he found no time to publish the book.

The ideal of political independence had a religious sanctity from the viewpoint of Vasudeo Balvant. Like Mazzini he felt he was in mourning when his country was held in bondage. Wearing barely necessary clothes, he ceased to apply the *gandha* to his forehead. Absence of the *gandha* on one's forehead was in his days a most eloquent sign of mourning. The exalted plane of selflessness and sanctity from which his soul fared forth can be discerned in the following exclamations of his: "I have

<sup>13</sup> G. B. Mulekar, *Life of the Swami Maharaj of Akkalkot* (Marathi), p. 75.

regarded all women as my mothers and sisters and their wealth is quite loathsome to me. If any such wealth has come to my hands unknowingly, it was spent on nothing else than a sacred cause."

As the year 1878 wore away the call of Swaraj challenged his whole being. The country clamoured for redress at his hands. He felt that a mournful spell was cast over the holy waters held by him in his palms for religious ablutions. For religion never throve without political independence. The daily dinner lost its taste for him because it was being taken under foreign rule! No entertainment consoled his disaffected mind. He dreamt of freedom at night and brooded over it by day.

Graphically describing the state of his mind, he cites the instances of persecution and drudgery of Indians under the British rule and observes in an agony of distraction: "Thinking day and night of this and a thousand other miseries, my mind has been wholly bent upon the downfall of the British power in India. I thought of nothing else. While answering the nature's call, while bathing, while going through religious ablutions, at dinner or in bed—and I had no sleep for hours together at times because of these thoughts—the idea haunted my mind. I used to rise up even in the dead of night and ponder over the ruin of the British until at last I became almost mad with the idea!" Thus did Vasudeo Balvant lose his self in the thoughts of Indian freedom!<sup>14</sup>

When the year 1879 dawned Vasudeo Balvant had already fixed the moment to unfurl the standard of revolt. He settled his domestic affairs for good, one or the other way. His sword was restless in its sheath. His impatient soul relished no counsel of restraint which, far from mollifying him, irritated him. If anyone advised him restraint he used to exclaim: "Restraint? It is now impossible! Time for deliberation is now gone! The auspicious time, the much-awaited moment has come! Lift up your arms and rush forth to the battlefield. This is the message of the hour!"<sup>15</sup> Murmuring such resolute words Vasudeo Balvant lifted his sword for raising the money required for his revolt through swoops on houses of the rich in the Deccan.

<sup>14</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant; also Memoirs of Baisaheb Phadke, by her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Umabai Phadke. Bai had independently said that her husband used to be sleepless because of these thoughts, and often went out and sat in the porch outside the house, engrossed in the thoughts.

<sup>15</sup> Memoirs of Baisaheb Phadke, by Mrs. Umabai Phadke. The exact Marathi words of Vasudeo Balvant were:

"हीच वेळ, हाच मुहूर्त, ये शत्रु नि हो पुढें। अशी वेळ आतां आली आहे."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE STORM BURSTS

ON 20th February 1879, at the dead of night all the devoted followers of Vasudeo Balvant and his colleagues including Vishnu Vinayak Gadre, Gopal Moreshwar Sathe, Ganesh Krishna Deodhar and Gopal Hari Karve rallied round his banner in a spacious field outside Loni, eight miles north of Poona, to celebrate the birth of his army.

The gathering numbering over two hundred strong was given a grand dinner by Vasudeo Balvant. He also went round making kind enquiries about some, cheering some others and infusing a spirit of comradeship among all. He distributed turbans, scarfs and money among them. He told them that the time for leaving their homes to start the struggle for Swaraj had come. "We shall secure many more weapons and much more money after our first raid. We shall have to fight against the police and the Government," he said.

Wishing to know their reaction, he asked them: "What is your opinion about the proposal?" And the whole assembly stood up and cried out: "Give us the arms and the money and we shall rise in revolt."

Assuring them that Daulatrao, one of his lieutenants, would arrange for everything, Vasudeo Balvant returned to Poona in a bullock cart at 3 a.m. the same night. It was after ten years that he travelled for the first time in a bullock cart!

Almost a week previously, from 13th February, Vasudeo Balvant had been on casual leave for eight days<sup>1</sup> to make the final preparations for the revolt. He had soon to close his establishment in Poona. His outdoor work engaged him till late hours at night. His wife, Baisaheb, was anxious about his movements and safety. Vasudeo Balvant realised her mental torment; but had to remove her to another place. His relations with his family at Shirdhon were strained, and so he decided to remove her to Junnar to her maternal uncle named Damle.

Bai was on the threshold of her youth. She was sure that her husband's revolutionary plans meant the end of their family happiness. She, however, rarely gave expression to her fears. But Vasudeo Balvant himself was unnerved at her plight. His

<sup>1</sup> J.D. Vol. 58-59 of 1879-80, Government of Bombay.

eyes slowly travelled over his household effects in the Thattiwale wada as he disclosed his intention to her and bade her farewell. His heart-rending farewell marked the climax of Bai's silent suffering and tears welled up in her eyes.

The scene baffled Vasudeo Balvant; but he soon collected himself, and consoled her saying that they were not parting company for good. "Our country will soon become free and then we would meet again," he said. Bai repeated the words in grim silence, and left for Junnar never to see her husband again!

On 21st February 1879, Vasudeo Balvant wrote a note to the Superintendent of his office in which he said: "I am sorry to inform you that I am sick with fever, cold and headache and consequently unable to attend office."<sup>2</sup> At 2 p.m. a special bullock cart drove up to his residence.<sup>3</sup> He loaded it with arms; covered the arms with haystack and fodder; spread a carpet over them and returned to his rooms. He lifted his favourite sword from in front of his family deity, and locking his rooms for the last time, jumped into the cart in the name of his country and God.

The bullock cart rolled on along the rough roads of Poona and reached Loni at nightfall. Vasudeo Balvant spent the night at Loni. Next evening all his men assembled in front of the ancient temple of Kanoba in the neighbouring Chinchoosi jungle, and they had their supper in a cave nearby. It was arranged for, by the daughter of Ravirao Scindia, the hereditary Patel of Loni. On the evening of 23rd February 1879, Vasudeo Balvant ordered his men to march towards the village of Dhamari.

Vasudeo Balvant had commenced the life of a rebel and launched his crusade against the mightiest of empires.

About 7 p.m. the people of Dhamari all of a sudden heard the sound of a horn and a conch followed by gunshots which filled them with consternation. Vasudeo Balvant's men soon entered Dhamari. They were carrying guns and swords, spears and cudgels, slings and straight swords. Two of them were riding their horses. On entering the hamlet Vasudeo Balvant arrested the village Ramoshi named Raoji, and ordered him to point out the houses of rich money-lenders. Raoji complied with the orders and silently disappeared from the scene.

The insurgents then attacked many houses including that of Daulatrao Killachand, the richest Marwari of Dhamari. No sooner had they launched the attack than all the inhabitants of

<sup>2</sup> I.D., Volume, 58-59 of 1879-80, Government of Bombay.

<sup>3</sup> Diary of Vasudeo Balvant, February 21, 1879.



Dhamari left their houses and ran away. Looting many houses the invaders collected the entire booty in the main square of Dhamari. Vasudeo Balvant had all along ambushed himself beside a house, and fired a few shots off his gun to maintain the dread of his party. The booty valued at over three thousand rupees was packed in a bag, and with a sign for dispersal from the leader the whole column decamped with the spoils.

After their departure Raoji Ramoshi of Dhamari contacted the Police Naik and with a few villagers started on their track. On sighting the pursuers Vasudeo Balvant scattered his men on the hill which they were climbing and showered a volley of bullets on the pursuers. The pursuers broke into confusion and ran away helter-skelter back to their village.

On reaching the Chinchoosi cave Vasudeo Balvant ordered the destruction of the clothes found in the booty. He despatched his lieutenants to Poona to purchase ammunition, and disbursed salaries to his men with part of the booty. Just then his men brought to him the reports about the approach of the police towards the hill. So he ordered his men to scale the adjoining higher hill far-removed from each other. For "even a few men climbing a precipice in this fashion present a frightening spectacle to the men below, and make the climbers appear, as if a larger number is moving up the hill." His men left the dinner in the cave and moving on to the higher hill, opened fire on the police. Most of the policemen bolted. A few, however, lagged behind. They were captured by the insurgents and escorted as prisoners to Vasudeo Balvant. The captives, however, saluted Vasudeo Balvant with the words "Ram! Ram!" The greeting revealed them to be non-Governmental people. They said: "There is no cause of fear today; but beware tomorrow. The Poona Horse is coming in search of you." After extracting important information from them Vasudeo Balvant ordered their release at a wayside spot in the jungle.

Vasudeo Balvant left the Chinchoosi forest along with his men, and appeared at the gates of Davdi Nimbgaon on 24th February. On seeing them the farmers of Davdi Nimbgaon began to run away. He called them back and with his affectionate words to them shortly attracted a large number of villagers around him. In a brief speech he said to them: "Do not take us to be freebooters and dacoits. We have come to do you good. Go and tell your men that we are wandering in the country for the good of the people. You need not be afraid of us. You may be quite sure that the days of the prosperity of

the ryots are now near at hand. So you must help us in our task."<sup>4</sup>

The speech created a favourable impression on his audience, and the villagers offered him pudding, curds and milk. They also assured him: "We shall give you all possible assistance and inform you beforehand if any Government people come to search for you."

Without entering Davdi Nimbgaon the band then returned to Loni for the night. At Loni police investigations into the first raid of the insurgents had already started. Vasudeo Balvant, therefore, passed the night and the next day under the roof of a faithful Ramoshi, awaiting his messenger from Poona.

He rejoined his men on the plain of Panmala on 26th February. As the party was enjoying the supper, it smelt the approach of the police. Fixing an appointment with his men in the Ahire jungle, therefore, Vasudeo Balvant quickly left the camp.

The extensive forest of Ramdara sheltered the mobile column the next day when the men tasted the meal consisting of bread of bajri and chutney.

The party left Ramdara for the fort of Sonuree called Malhargarh on 1st March 1879. There, Vasudeo Balvant and a few new comrades joined it. The steeps ran over uneven mounds and rubble. The Patil of Malhargarh cordially received them, and informed them of the nice arrangement he had made for their dinner. The dinner over, the guests encamped at the foot of the still higher hill of Malhargarh.

On the top of Malhargarh stood a temple of Shiva called Savleshvar. Vasudeo Balvant had a great fascination for holy places, and although tired by the weary march he started for the *darshan* of the deity in the temple. He reached Savleshvar within an hour. The awe-inspiring full size idol inside the temple evoked genial solace in his heart, and he lost himself in meditation. He was aroused by the arrival of the Patil of Malhargarh accompanied by a few new recruits. Vasudeo Balvant left for his camp in their company.

When he reached the camp his scouts told him that the Inamdar of Amlī had some guns. Vasudeo Balvant despatched the Patil of Rajewadi to procure the firearms and asked another person to bring some more from Bharatgaon. After the arms were seized and brought to him he led the party to the temple of Khandoba at Jejuri. The temple commands universal reverence amongst the Ramoshis. The party worshipped the deity,

<sup>4</sup> Diary of Vasudeo Balvant, February 24, 1879.

feasted on *puranpoli* and prepared to march on the village of Valhe.

Vasudeo Balvant sent a communication, on 5th March, to the village headman of Valhe ordering him to pay the tribute to his officer and intimating him that his men would march on Valhe if he failed to do so. Being away from Valhe, the headman could not respond to the order. Enraged at his silence, Vasudeo Balvant swooped down on Valhe the same night. A huge uproar resounded the streets of Valhe as the visitors entered it. The villagers were well prepared for defence, and had buried their treasure at unsuspected spots. The visitors failed to amass any appreciable booty. At last, they raided some huts occupied by Mangs and recovered five brand new swords from the huts. Brandishing the swords, the party started for the forest of Pangara by a circuitous route.

Continuous stay at one place is a potential danger in guerilla warfare. For such warfare relies on harassing the adversary by keeping him in the dark about the whereabouts of his opponents. To avoid being traced by the Government Vasudeo Balvant shifted his camp almost every day. His column, therefore, left Pangara immediately and rested for the day in the hamlet of Bhatmala.

At night, Vasudeo Balvant spread his light bedding in a dry rill. As he peered through the darkness before going to bed the cliffs of the famous fort of Purandar rose before him in the distance. He, therefore, fixed the next halt at the fort and went to sleep.

Next morning, on 7th March, the party reached the fort of Purandar. After taking his meal Vasudeo Balvant supervised all the arrangement in the camp and then went to have his siesta in an improvised apartment.

In the evening newcomers from Purandar met him and promised forty to fifty men provided the "Maharaj", as Vasudeo Balvant was called by his followers, stayed on for a few more days. Some marriage ceremonies were going to be solemnised in the village of Kale. The police were likely to come there and harass the villagers. They, therefore, sought his protection. Deputing some of his men to the hamlet to reassure the villagers, Vasudeo Balvant repaired to the ravine of Waghdara, half a mile from Kale. He distributed fortnightly salary to his men, and some of them left on short leave for their native places.

In the ravine of Waghdara Vasudeo Balvant remained till 12th March and finalised his immediate plans. He contacted the Kolis of Hiwalwada and Bhairwada. On 8th March, he

went to dine at the hut of Kushaba Patil and settled the terms on which the newcomers were to be employed in consultation with the Patil.

The marriage ceremonies at Kale were over on 11th March, and the news about the aftermath of his flight from Poona reached Vasudeo Balvant the same day. Police parties had started in his pursuit. Forest officials had whizzed past Wagh-dara. Some of his Ramoshi followers and companions from Poona were arrested and a vigorous search was proceeding for his own person.

These and other reports were heard by Vasudeo Balvant while taking his dinner cooked by the Guravs arrested by him at Kadepathar. He was dismayed to learn that a neighbour at Poona had told the police about his wife's departure for Junnar and that his brother Krishna was called by the police from Bombay and detained for some time.

The next day, on 13th March, Vasudeo Balvant had finished his bath and was supervising lessons in fencing being practised by his men, when a messenger from Wadi reported that the vanguard of the police party had reached Saswad. Vasudeo Balvant feared that his camp would be besieged. A faithful follower named Balvi, however, assured him: "Maharaj, you need not at all be anxious. My cartman will escort you safe to your destination." Balvi also offered his cart to his leader. As an earnest of his fidelity Balvi placed his hand on his master's feet and added: "We will contact the Police Patil and convey to you whatever information we can collect from him." Vasudeo Balvant left the place in the cart and crossing the country by a hilly tract, entered the Bhore State, then called the Pant Sachao's territory, on 13th March.

Resting in the jungle at night, the party migrated to an open field during daytime. Its leaders wandered in the villages and passed for forest officers. The raiders launched their first attack in the Bhore State on Harnai which was predominantly inhabited by Wanis and merchants. The visitors serially raided all the houses in Harnai and bagged ample provisions such as coconuts and groundnuts. The villagers raised a hue and cry against the invaders. In one house the bravery of a Wani woman excited the visitors' admiration. She bundled up her jewellery in her *saree*, and offered a violent resistance to the Ramoshis when they tried to forcibly remove the jewellery from her. Attracted by her cries, Vasudeo Balvant rushed forth to the scene from another quarter and flew into a rage when he saw the Ramoshis engaged in a scuffle with a woman; for he had issued strict orders

to his men that during raids women must not be molested and children must not be hurt! He, therefore, admonished the Ramoshis, and assured the woman complete safety as she pathetically exclaimed: "Shiva! Shiva!"

At Mangdari, there lived a man of fortune named Agashe. Agashe had organised Mangdari for defence against the "invaders". Of the many daring exploits of Vasudeo Balvant, the assault on Mangdari, on 16th March, was the most daring and defiant one and carried out with lightning speed.

Vasudeo Balvant sent a message to Agashe saying: "Henceforth you should pay up the revenue to us!" On receipt of this challenge, the whole of Mangdari was on the alert. The inhabitants concealed their valuables in the fields. When the raiders entered Mangdari the more courageous amongst the inhabitants of the place advanced on them firing a series of shots at them. Mistaking the reports for the charge of his men, Vasudeo Balvant who was following his men went ahead. But he saw Keshavrao and Daulatrao wounded and excited. He then assumed the leadership of his men, and fired continuous shots off his own gun on the villagers who finally surrendered to him and deserted the village. The Ramoshis ransacked the houses in Mangdari and decamped with immense booty.

On the southern outskirts of Poona extended the thick forest of Khadakwasla, encircling a big lake. The site, which has strategic importance from the viewpoint of war, now houses the National Defence Academy. Vasudeo Balvant immediately realised the capacity of the thick forest to conveniently conceal "two hundred people". He, therefore, encamped for the night, on 17th March, in this forest. During the night he described to the villagers of adjoining hamlets the atrocities committed by the English on Indians and exhorted them to revolt against the British Government.

The next halt of the party fell on Sinhagad. The guides, however, led it by a wrong hilly route. Many of the raiders slipped on the way and suffered injuries. Vasudeo Balvant himself stumbled on a hill slope and had a close brush with death; but his downward slip was arrested by a projecting rock and he was saved. A Ramoshi was bitten by a snake and began to writhe with pain. His comrades consoled him and said: "During this month the poison of a snake does not affect men." But their assurance was belied by the acute pain which the victim was experiencing. Moved at his plight, Vasudeo Balvant opened his heart to his men and said: "Brothers, I have not left home to do any harm to you. The Almighty has always

been gracious and taken care of us up to this day and he is still our protector. So do not be alarmed!" He sprinkled sanctified earth and *Bilva* leaves in the name of "Guru Maharaj" (Shree Datta) on the injury of the patient and assured him that his pain would stop. They passed the night in a temple on the way to Ramkada.

Vasudeo Balvant's Koli adherents at Ramkada arranged for the meals of his party. When Vasudeo Balvant offered to pay for the food the Kolis declined to accept the payment. The insurgents then looted Sonapur on the evening of 20th March, and bagged a substantial booty before reaching Wadasgaon.

At Wadasgaon the local Patil arranged for their meals. Other villagers hurried down with sweet curds and milk for Vasudeo Balvant. After the meals, Vasudeo Balvant reciprocated their affection by presenting them with clothes and sweets and started back for Sinhagad via Ahirwadi, posing as a forest officer in the presence of inquisitive men.

But hardly had he crossed a mile or two when he heard the thud of the horse's hoofs in the distance. He accelerated his pace, stepped into a roadside field and hid himself behind the trunk of a tree. The *swars* apparently in his pursuit rode past with loud shouts without detecting him.

Vasudeo Balvant reached Sinhagad and shortly afterwards started for Ghora. After reaching Ghora he hired a boat at the river and landed at Angle on the other side. Resting for the night, on 24th March, in the temple at Angle, he left for Poona. On his way he encountered a party of infantry and *swars* but evaded them. He was next received by the Dhangars of Kotwadi on the bank of the river Mutha. Addressing them, Vasudeo Balvant called their attention to the way in which they were ruined by the English, and said: "If you do not assist me in destroying the British power in India you shall never be happy. If you do not help me the British Government will completely destroy your children."

His men camping four miles further had posted two smart guides on the yonder hill. They had instructed the guides to carry their leader in a palanquin if necessary. The guides conveyed Vasudeo Balvant to their shanties, and presented him with fresh milk and freshly churned buttermilk. He thanked the Dhangars for their love for him and said: "I have been ceaselessly toiling to overpower the English, and have taken great pains to overthrow the British Government. If I succeed

in destroying the British Government, your *inams* and *vatans* will be permanently restored to you.”<sup>5</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant's speech created a great impression on the Dhangars, and because of their respect for him, on the advice of Daulatrao, they invited him to arbitrate in their dispute with the Kunbees. Vasudeo Balvant agreed to do so at some future date and rejoined his men in the jungle.

Rambling on the border of the Bhor State and British India, he enjoyed the hospitality of the Dhangars, Kolis and other village people inhabiting the region who made perfect arrangement for the meals of their guests. He then arrived at Janegaon on 29th March. The local Police Patil arranged for their meals. He had organised a rally of agriculturists in the forest. Addressing the agriculturists, Vasudeo Balvant said: “What is the duty of the parents towards their children? Consider me also as an infant dependent on the parents. The child cannot lift up two maunds of weight. But a man of twenty-five years of age would easily do it. This is my state at present. I am an infant and just as the parents protect the children against fever, cold and other diseases and anxiously hope to receive support from them in their old age, and the children also are dutiful and render help to their parents in old age, if you assist me at present, as your child I will also discharge my duty towards you as my parents and help you with the reward, when I have overthrown the English Government. But if you do not assist me now then the English, who are at present persecuting you, will exterminate you!”<sup>6</sup>

The villagers assured Vasudeo Balvant: “Whenever you come here we will render you all assistance. You need not have any fear!”

Asking the guide to take them to Savargaon the party reached Savargaon at sunset. Vasudeo Balvant demanded the land revenue from the landlords of the village and on their hesitating to pay it directed his men to collect it by force. As the invaders broke into Savargaon a tumultuous uproar rent the air. The womenfolk offered their ornaments to him to save the village from ruin. But Vasudeo Balvant declined to accept them as “the wealth of women was quite loathsome to him”, and he had always “a horror of looting the property of females”. The women must have been agreeably surprised at this unexpected chivalry of the “rebel” whose legendary dread had completely paralysed their mind.

<sup>5</sup> Diary of Vasudeo Balvant, March 24, 1879.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, March 29, 1879.

The raiders in the meantime had dragged the Police Patil of Savargaon to Vasudeo Balvant. Vasudeo Balvant asked him to show the houses of the local Banias to them. Just then, however, a townsman shouted, pointing out to a lane: "Look here! Here they are!" The raiders dragged the Banias out of the lane. The townsmen exclaimed about one of them: "This Nama has made a great *zuloom* on us. If you will avenge it we will be very grateful to you." The Banias refused to deliver their belongings to the raiders. But the raiders beat them and compelled them to do so. After collecting the booty the column prepared to march away. But the villagers reminded the raiders of the debt-deeds, papers and account books of the Banias which held them to ransom. Vasudeo Balvant ordered the records to be piled up in an open square, and ceremoniously set them ablaze to the great joy of the people. The insurgents then left for a mountainous cave. This happened on 29th March.

Two swift marches brought the column near Chandkhed, at night, on 31st March 1879. Their footfalls bestirred the Dhangars inhabiting the region along the route. But they greeted the raiders after knowing their identity. The party's moonlight swoop on Chandkhed was over within an hour. It was the high mark of efficiency attained by the fighting men in their campaign.

Vasudeo Balvant was now limping with a swollen foot and had also developed temperature. Gopalrao Sathe too had sustained injuries. Vasudeo Balvant, therefore, decided to rest for a few days and relieved his men on leave for visiting their homes. He himself went to Poona. The developments which took place subsequently, however, compelled him to abandon the mountainous region and opened a new phase in the progress of the revolt.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE FIGHTING COLUMN

THE political atmosphere in India became surcharged with excitement as reports of the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant were flashed across newspapers, and the whole of India struggled hard to comprehend the real implications of the upheaval in the Deccan. The assurances of Vasudeo Balvant to the bewildered people also threw intriguing colours in the mysterious uprising, and the Government concluded that the situation was fraught with grave danger in the near future.

The raids were not only a threat to the life and property of the people, but also a challenge to the authority of the Government. The gravity of the problem is very well reflected in the following words of Sir Richard Temple, the then Governor of Bombay. He says that his (Vasudeo Balvant's) "followers, peasants of humble caste but of hardihood and courage, were actuated by the hope of gain in times when employment and labour had proved scanty. Still, the readiness with which they answered the mandate of their shadowy and half-mysterious chief, like bees hiving, the apathetic and unsatisfactory behaviour of the people in many villages and the sympathy known to be felt, if not openly evinced, by many of the upper classes, were grave circumstances demanding reflection on our part."<sup>1</sup>

Most of the intrepid fighters, who confronted the Government with the difficult problem, were victims of poverty and starvation. The responsibility of the Government in reducing them to the deplorable plight was made sufficiently clear to them by Vasudeo Balvant. The majority of the fighters, who thronged the fighting column of Vasudeo Balvant, was no doubt actuated by the lust of immediate gain. But the column was not a mere mob of freebooters. Many of the fighters were soon converted into men with genuine anti-Government bias. These included a brave Ramoshi chief whom Vasudeo Balvant loved to call Sardar Daulatrao Naik.

Daulatrao hailed from the Koregaon jungle and impressed Vasudeo Balvant at first sight. He was in the prime of his youth, having scarcely crossed his twenties. Daulatrao's self-

<sup>1</sup> Sir Richard Temple, *Men and Events of My Time in India*, p. 470.

confident demeanour, gleaming eyes set in a black countenance and rare physical stature ensured his selection by Vasudeo Balvant for his column and considerably strengthened its ranks.

The elder Ramoshis called him Daulatya; but conscious of his high status in his hierarchy, Vasudeo Balvant called him Sardar Daulatrao Naik.<sup>2</sup>

After leaving Koregaon Daulatrao moved from village to village and at last settled at Loni. His rebellious inclination edged by the tenets of political revolt preached to him by Vasudeo Balvant inspired him with crude yet patriotic idealism. Vasudeo Balvant often enjoyed his holiday at Daulatrao's hut when Daulatrao was constantly on the run, perfecting the arrangements for his leader. Once, when both of them visited the victory pillar at Koregaon raised by the British to the memory of those who fought on the side of the British in 1818, Vasudeo Balvant dwelt upon the real implication of the pillar; Daulatrao realised the degradation of political slavery and pledged his life to the cause of freedom.

Once he joined the ranks of Vasudeo Balvant, Daulatrao never deserted his leader, and fell fighting on the battlefield in the end.

The men who thronged the fighting column of Vasudeo Balvant numbered over three hundred. Ramoshis, Kunbees, Mangs, Kolis, Dhangars, Chambhars and Brahmins dominated its ranks. It had a few Pardeshis and Muslims at first. But they soon left the band.

The influence of Vasudeo Balvant infiltrated all the layers of the society as is evident from these select names of persons belonging to different castes, appearing in the accounts of the revolt: Pilaji Ramoshi, Kushaba Sable, Rama Koli, Kondaji Nhavi, Babaji Chambhar, Sakharam Mahar and Kondu Mang!

Almost all the hereditary Patils of the villages which Vasudeo Balvant visited sympathised with the cause he espoused. To mention a few, Babaji and Janrao Scindia of Loni, Kushaba Patil of Purandar, Raghoji Patil of Sonuri and Dhondi Patil of Rajewadi. Sometimes, as in the case of the Scindias of Loni, representatives of one or two generations—grandfather, father and grandson—participated in the upheaval. Even the female members of the families would serve Vasudeo Balvant and his comrades by arranging for their meals and carrying their messages to the proper quarters.

These details indicate to what extent the leader had endeared

<sup>2</sup> "Daulatrao is a first class Sardar of Ramoshis."—Diary of Vasudeo Balvant, February 24, 1879.

himself to the masses and how deep and extensive his influence had spread among them.

Vasudeo Balvant's colleagues from Poona controlled and directed the operations of the column, once the broad outline was drawn by Vasudeo Balvant. They had staked their all for the realisation of the ideal and prominently included Gopal Moreshwar Sathe and Vishnu Vinayak Gadre.

Gopal Moreshwar accompanied Vasudeo Balvant till the last and was arrested by the Government along with his master; but was not prosecuted for some unknown reason. Sathe's native place was Jambhulpada in the Kolaba District and he frequently went to Poona for a change. There he cultivated close friendship with Vasudeo Balvant. Himself as stoutly built as Vasudeo Balvant, he was a burning idealist, and willingly threw his splendid prospects in life to the winds by joining Vasudeo Balvant in his revolt. Sathe toiled for the sacred cause, and loyally served his master in prosperity and adversity alike. He was short-statured, light-complexioned and of a slight figure, but hardy and brave. He bore faint marks of smallpox on his face, sported a sparse beard and wore a white *angarkha* and a tight red *pheta* on his head. When Vasudeo Balvant began his revolutionary life Sathe left Jambhulpada for Poona and shared the responsibility of a political conspiracy with Vasudeo Balvant in order to overthrow the British Government.

Vishnu Vinayak Gadre was the native of Khed near Poona. His mind was occupied by thoughts of revolt against the Government even while he was a student in the Poona Training College. With the fiery zeal of a revolutionary conspirator he became an active rebel under the preachings of Vasudeo Balvant. He also studied the art of war in Vasudeo Balvant's secret organisation. Brave and daring, he once forced his adversaries to surrender their swords with a mere *lathi* in his hand, while leading the attack on Mangdari. Tall, slim, Gadre still roamed in his teens, when sacrificing his personal ambitions, he too acquiesced in the ambitious project of his leader. Gadre went into prolonged exile when the revolt failed, but never sought mercy at the hands of the British.

A special cook, Sitaram Ayah Gokak from Baneshwar, held the office of Vasudeo Balvant's camp-cook. He was a Kanarese. He also served his master in establishing contacts with the Ramoshis from his region. Talkative by nature and darkish in complexion, Sitaram Gokak prepared the meals for his master out of provisions offered by the village Patils or purchased in the open market.

Ganesh Krishna Deodhar, a youth of about 20 and a student, participated in all the preparation of the revolt and was with Vasudeo Balvant at Loni to celebrate the birth of the insurgent army. He was, however, arrested after the first raid on Dhamari and sentenced to one month's rigorous imprisonment.

Gopal Hari Karve was one of the Poona youths present on the aforesaid occasion, and remained at Loni the first night while his leader returned to Poona. He participated in all the operations.

Bhaskar Joshi was an astrologer and although his name never appears as an active fighter in the published accounts of the revolt he was apparently a very subtle political genius. He acted as the trusted emissary of Vasudeo Balvant in executing far-flung designs and sounding distant and high-placed quarters, native States and important personages on the help they were likely to give for the revolt. He also had to sacrifice all his happiness in life as a participant in the revolt.

Many youths in Poona and elsewhere were members of the secret organisation of Vasudeo Balvant. The Government afterwards banked upon the evidence obtained from some of them through threats and torture to ensure the conviction of Vasudeo Balvant in the law court. It is quite certain that a number of young men passed days in exile or concealed their part in the struggle from the public and the Government once the revolt failed.

The trumpet of the army used to be blown by a Burud trumpeter. A conch shell was at times blown instead of the trumpet. There were two horses with the insurgents at the outset; but subsequently the column included only footmen.

Vasudeo Balvant changed his dress to suit a rebel's life. The dhoti is not quite convenient for such life. He, therefore, replaced it by a *surwar*. He wore a short garment on the chest. Ample moustache covered his broad red lips beneath a straight nose. He had whiskers over his robust bulged-out cheeks, and his beard flowing down the chest touched his cuirass. While in a tranquil and jovial mood Vasudeo Balvant adorned his neck with a rosary of *Rudraksha* beads and the ascetic *Kundala* ornaments suspended from his ears. His dark long hair swung upon his broad forehead and stout neck, and during the journey it was held down by a tight white *pheta* on his head.

Vasudeo Balvant always had his favourite sword with him. It had a fine blade of steel and a ruby-studded scabbard. While his strong hand wielded the weapon, a loaded rifle or revolver was carried by his aide-de-camp. *Dandpatta* or straight elastic

sword was also his favourite weapon. Immediately before his arrest he had no personal guard except a few trustworthy adherents. During this period he carried convenient handy defensive arms useful in hand-to-hand encounter.

In the warrior's changed dress Vasudeo Balvant's personality had an enhanced romantic charm. He was five feet and ten inches in height and the rebel's attire and arms on his stoutly built body gave grandeur to his dynamic personality. Burning embers flared up in his bright expressive eyes, when he denounced the British bureaucrats. His expansive brow reflected stupefaction when he was immersed in thoughts about the liberation of his motherland. But a distinct impress of compassion for the impoverished masses marked his countenance as he dwelt upon the plight of his countrymen. Because of his fame his name worked like magic among the oppressed illiterate masses. For they were confident that he would fight shoulder to shoulder along with them against the "English Sahebs" with superior strategy, dash and courage.

Salary was disbursed to the fighting men every fortnight. They were divided in different groups such as men with *lathis*, slingers, swordsmen and musketeers. They drew a salary ranging from rupees four to rupees sixteen a month which was quite a handsome remuneration in 1879. Supply of arms and ammunition to the men was the concern of Vasudeo Balvant.

Vasudeo Balvant had acquired minute information about the mountain fastnesses from which he swooped down upon wealthy people in different villages. Thus well-acquainted with the region, he easily slipped out of the hands of formidable Government forces and crossed entire districts, leaving his captors in complete bewilderment.

Sardar Daulatrao Naik deputised for Vasudeo Balvant during the latter's absence and his word was law to the fighting men on such occasions. Vasudeo Balvant arranged for their food by obtaining it from the villagers by force or purchasing the grain required for the purpose in the open market. During the whole of the campaign he had never to worry about getting provisions for his men.

The booty procured constituted the sinews of war. It was often deposited at several places. The insurgents had strict orders to deliver the entire booty to the cashier. Vasudeo Balvant waged his war with a high moral purpose. He had, therefore, issued strict orders to his men that during raids womenfolk must never be molested; children must not be hurt!

In the month of March 1879, Vasudeo Balvant was directing

the operations of one of his platoons. There were two or three such platoons according to the deposition of a witness in the law court later on.

The Government of Bombay realised the political character of the raids which took place in the month of March, and felt convinced that the operations were systematically directed by some master-mind. At some places the Ramoshis were stated to have displayed police ribbons or belts to make their victims believe that they were policemen. How could mere illiterate dacoits by themselves play such tricks? The dacoits also would ordinarily rob only rich *saucars*. But an adventurous plot to attack the Khed Government treasury came to light about this time which testified to the political nature of the revolt.

A Muslim informant had disclosed the plot to the Government. It was hit upon by Vasudeo Balvant himself, and aimed at killing the police guards in charge of the treasury, capturing their arms and seizing the money in the treasury. But the Muslim peached and the project fell through.

The Government now moved swiftly to capture the ringleader of the revolt. The leadership of the revolt assumed by Vasudeo Balvant also became known to the outside world by a strange coincidence in the first week of March 1879. Major Daniell, who, as the District Superintendent of Police, was then investigating the Dhamari dacoity case, interrogated several persons suspected to be implicated in the raid. One Ramoshi suspect among them furnished him with a very valuable clue regarding the leadership of the revolt. He said that he was participating in the raids under the leadership of a "Maharaj", who was working in the Military Finance Office at Poona.

Next afternoon Major Daniell walked into the Military Finance Office. He was accompanied by high-ranking police officers and also the Ramoshi. Daniell asked the Ramoshi to look out for the "Maharaj" among the clerks. But the Ramoshi could not find him out. It was then detected that one clerk, Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, had been on casual leave for eight days from 13th February and had not resumed duty. From the more detailed antecedents of Vasudeo Balvant Daniell concluded that the "Maharaj" was none other than Vasudeo Balvant Phadke.

The plans of Vasudeo Balvant for an armed revolt were known to a considerable number of Poona citizens. They would often point out to him as the person planning a revolt, as he went by the road. But when it was authoritatively found that he was leading the revolt it surprised all in no small measure.

Major Daniell secured the warrant of arrest against Vasudeo Balvant and a search warrant for his residence. He proceeded to the rooms of Vasudeo Balvant in the Thattiwale wada with a posse of police and seeing the door locked, enquired of the neighbours about the inmates. On learning that no one had been to the house for many days past, he broke open the door of the house in the presence of the *panchas* and had the residence closely searched. Two guns, two fine swords, a chain armour, some foils, gunpowder, four seers of lead, some holsters, two handles of foils and maps were recovered from the house. The news of the sensational search and recovery of the weapons created great excitement in Poona and other places, and its dangerous implications were underlined by Anglo-Indian journals in hostile words.

The atmosphere in India was tense and added to the tempo of the Deccan revolt. By the middle of March 1879, the Rampa rising broke out in the province of Madras and crippled the Government forces at Rajamahendri. They mobbed the Collector at Chodvaram, kidnapped him and looted the Government boats, under the leadership of two rebel chiefs named Pallalla Ambul and Karam Tamman. The *Madras Mail* published the news of this rebellion, and demanded the immediate appointment of a European officer to suppress it with an iron hand.

There was yet time for the Madras Government to concede the demand. But the Government of Bombay acted upon the suggestion immediately in regard to the Deccan revolt. Major Daniell had till then been investigating the Deccan raids. He himself was naturally selected by the Government of Bombay as the officer on special duty for suppressing the revolt in the Deccan.

Among the personnel at the disposal of the Government there was indeed no other officer besides Major Daniell who could be equal to the task. Daniell had seen service in the army, and risen to the position of a Major with a rich subsequent experience in the Indian police force. On the wrong side of forty, he had succeeded in stamping out lawlessness during the Deccan riots a few years previously. He was also familiar with the intricate region of the province. When, therefore, the question of appointing a special officer for suppressing the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant arose the Governor of Bombay could think of only one officer—Major Henry William Daniell!

Major Daniell was short in stature. Once he took up any

case he persisted in pursuing the investigation till the case was done with. On such occasions his blue penetrating eyes deeply set in his robust ruddy cheeks flared up with imagination and he reached quick conclusions. He never hesitated even to risk his life, and willingly sacrificed his pleasures in the discharge of his duties. All his fine qualities were put to a severe test while capturing Vasudeo Balvant, and his efforts were ultimately crowned with success. The British press later on applauded his triumph when he went back to England, and the British public also accorded him a grand welcome for his achievement. In his days the curiosity aroused by his appearance in any locality in Poona almost rivalled the curiosity evoked by another famous sleuth, Inspector Brewin, in the days of the revolutionary brothers Chapekar in 1897-98.

Daniell promulgated new precautionary orders, and tightened up security measures all over the province. Ramoshis were listed in a muster-roll, and their presence in the village was ensured through a daily roll call in the evening. The village revenue was sent to the district treasury under a strong armed escort. Rewards were announced for the apprehension of the "wanted" Ramoshis, and a conference of all the District Collectors was convened at Poona with a view to co-ordinating the efforts which were being made all over the province to suppress the revolt.

The Government remedies, however, proved futile. News of renewed raids on villages poured in from all over the province. The terror of Vasudeo Balvant gradually spread all over Maharashtra, and his name resounded throughout the country. He established a legend in every Mahratta household. People started guessing on sight whether any roaming *sannyasi* with a beard and sunburnt face overlooking a stout body was not Vasudeo Balvant. And gossipers narrated to interested listeners in hundred wondering tongues novel exploits of Vasudeo Balvant. They averred that Vasudeo Balvant had intimated the people of a certain village in advance that he was going to march on the village on the appointed day. Others asserted that Vasudeo Balvant had declared himself to be an *avatar* of Shivaji Maharaj and had proclaimed his irrevocable determination to drive the British out of India and liberate his motherland. The whole country hummed with rumours and counter-rumours, debating the exploits of Vasudeo Balvant with strange interest.

The rumours had not sprung up without justification. The raids were directed against places hundreds of miles apart and



took place within a couple of days, all of them in the name of Vasudeo Balvant. Government, therefore, was not sure about the real extent of the trouble or as to the leaders who were directing the revolt, besides Vasudeo Balvant.

Village officers and villagers of good position were found to be implicated in Vasudeo Balvant's movements and actions.<sup>3</sup> The village Patils arranged for his food, cautioned him against the Government moves and the common people venerated him as their liberator. The Government had, therefore, to fight its way against heavy odds in suppressing the revolt without any immediate chance of success.

Vasudeo Balvant, however, paid very dearly for this triumph. His skirmishes and ambuscades had deprived him of all peace in life. A note in his autobiography states: "While rambling with Ramoshis I fell down five or six times from the top of a hill so heavily as might have caused my death. But I escaped. I was also very nearly bitten by snakes. Many times I bathed only after two or three days, fasted till evening several times, and had often to sit under the shade of trees on the top of hills without water."<sup>4</sup>

Although a steel ring of soldiers and detectives was thrown around Poona Vasudeo Balvant slipped into the city incognito, and his ingress and egress defied detection by the police. His diary records one such visit. He says: "Got up early in the morning and went to a friend's house in Poona. The friend informed me that a minute search is going on after me. Investigations are still going on daily. Men had been sent to my wife to enquire about me. So I had better not stay in Poona, but leave at once. There is a great talk about my secret visits to Poona. I accordingly left his house, met another friend, wandered about the town secretly and tired and exhausted slept for the night in the Ganapati temple in Bhavani Peth."<sup>5</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant craved for rest after a month and a half of a rebel's life. In the first week of April 1879, he, therefore, asked Daulatrao to meet him again at Navalakh Umbre and left for Poona. His revolt received fresh impetus as the new phase of the struggle was opened by his followers and it soon attracted the attention of the whole of India.

<sup>3</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Vol: XVIII; Part III, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> *Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant*.

<sup>5</sup> *Diary of Vasudeo Balvant*, April 2, 1879.

## CHAPTER X

### THE CHALLENGE

**T**OWARDS the first week of May 1879, Vasudeo Balvant issued his famous proclamation. It was a document denouncing the British policy of economic exploitation of India and demanding economic relief for the ryots as a matter of natural right. It constituted the first bold challenge of its kind to the British Government during the Indian freedom struggle. The proclamation was addressed to the Government and read as follows:

"After looting the surrounding villages we have at last returned to Poona while your soldiers have gone out searching for us elsewhere.

"We inform the Government that this year, at this season of plenty, foodgrains are being sold at famine rates and in some districts there is actual famine, while nearly the whole mass of the people (except the rich) in the Mahratta country are without *rojgar* (employment) or occupation and are on the verge of ruin.

"While the Government have already robbed all the people of their wealth and reduced them to the state of beggars, the Government have only insufficiently opened a few works for the famine-stricken people while others are left to maintain themselves by plundering.

"A large number of people are left to grumble against the Government and die for want of food.

"Our Hindu astrologers forecast a more terrible famine than that of 1877 next year. We, therefore, warn the Government that unless extensive famine works are opened throughout the length and breadth of this province for the common ryots who are without employment and they get employment in the various trades or occupations, burden of Government taxes is reduced, salaries of high-paid Europeans curtailed and the native (*Swadeshi*) trade and commerce flourishes with Government encouragement, the operations till now confined to rich Indians would extend to Europeans. And with the treasure so collected, we would assemble a large number of brave followers, begin rapine and massacre of the

Europeans wherever they are found throughout the country and stir up another mutiny."

After mentioning the Governor and the Sessions Judge of Poona as their immediate possible targets the proclamation declared: "Poor men of the villages, who go out in the jungle for bringing wood to maintain themselves are caught by the police, who dare not, however, face us! If the famine comes next year nearly the whole of the population will die for want of food."

Stating that many groups would simultaneously rise in different parts of the country, the proclamation asked the Government to recollect the success of Shivaji the Great, in the reign of Aurangzeb, to think calmly over the warning and with a true Christian attitude act accordingly.

Having indicated the terrible consequences in case the Government did not concede the demands, the proclamation warned the Government that the Governor and others would also, as a result, be put to death.

Copies of the proclamation, which was issued in the name of Vasudeo Balvant, were posted to the Governor, the Collectors and other Government officers.

The proclamation sent a thrill of excitement throughout India. But the Government went on undeterred in its plan to suppress the revolt and moved its troops into the disturbed region. On 4th May 1879, they despatched two Companies of the 4th Rifles under Colonel Crispin and two European officers to Jejuri, and three hundred men of the 11th Native Infantry under Major Fulton and three other officers to Junnar. Captain Braine and one officer marched on to Shirwal with hundred men of the 18th Native Infantry. They were all provided with two hundred rounds of ball ammunition each.

While many Anglo-Indian journals expressed satisfaction at these swift measures the *Times of India* further advised the authorities to minutely search for the causes which inspired such a multitude of men to stake their lives in looting the villages.

The *Bombay Gazette* replied to this counsel with a long editorial in which it said: "... A contemporary had made out the dacoits of Deccan to be a set of poor miserable ill-used creatures, emaciated from famine, hopeless and helpless." And after raising a forest of misrepresentations it proceeded to say: "... We do not believe this. ... There are more men than Wasudew Bulwunt who have a hand in stirring up these

dacoities. A contemporary blames the police. But there are times when no police can meet the emergencies of the crisis. When men upon whose loyalty Government had a right to depend instigate the lawless to rebellion it has often happened that martial law has to be proclaimed before order could be restored. . . . No lawless dacoits could have escaped so long unless men of influence had lent them protection and shelter. . . ."

The Government also issued a circular to their servants in subordinate services warning them that in case of their complicity in the revolt suitable action would be taken against them. The people also were warned by the Government that the expenditure incurred on the punitive police stationed in the disturbed area would be recovered from them by imposition of collective fines on the villages. The origin of collective fines as a deterrent to active popular sympathy for national movement is thus traceable to Vasudeo Balvant's times.

Despite the stringent measures Vasudeo Balvant remained at large. The Government, therefore, invoked the last ingenious remedy in its armoury to effect his arrest and proclaimed a big reward to anyone who helped in capturing him.

The proclamation announcing the reward contained personal marks of identification and description of Vasudeo Balvant, and promised a reward aggregating to Rs. 4,000 to anyone who helped in the capture of "the tall rebel, with a slight figure, a straight nose and grey light-coloured eyes, who spoke English well". In order to ensure that the alluring reward should not fail to tempt even an accomplice of Vasudeo Balvant who might be afraid about his own safety, the proclamation promised a free pardon to any of the associates of Vasudeo Balvant, who furnished the information leading to his arrest.

Proclamation of a handsome reward for the capture of an underground political revolutionary was a patent device of the British Government in later years. It was first tried by the Government in the times of Vasudeo Balvant.

The reward proved beyond cavil or criticism that Vasudeo Balvant had completely nullified the power of the Government and dealt a serious blow to its prestige. The reward, if evaluated in the post-war rupee, will have to be calculated at least eight times the amount announced.

Within a few days of the Government announcement, however, a counter-proclamation signed by Vasudeo Balvant himself, who was carrying the big price on his own head, appeared on the walls of several cities. It announced even bigger head-money

on the Governor, the Collectors and the Sessions Judge of Poona. Copies of this counter-proclamation were posted by Vasudeo Balvant to newspapers with an order to their editors to publish the counter-proclamation on the front page. The editors were warned that they could fail to do so only on pain of losing their right hand.

The days of the month of May rolled on in this tense atmosphere when the second phase of the revolt soon unfolded itself, making the atmosphere more tense.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE KONKAN CAMPAIGN

As the Government forces hunted the insurgent strongholds over the Ghats Vasudeo Balvant's men crossed the Kasara Ghat to avoid a straight fight with superior Government forces and landed into Konkan.

The new phase of the revolt was graphically described by the *Bombay Gazette* in the following words: "Terror-stricken at the despatch of a body of the Poona Horse under Captain Westmacott from the camp at Talegaon, about two hundred dacoits crossed over the Ghats into Panvel Taluka in which they have been committing depredations without let or hindrance from either the inhabitants or the police."<sup>1</sup>

A solitary policeman guarding a stretch of several villages was no match for the raiders. Not a single policeman, however, was met with by them throughout their Konkan campaign, possibly because the lonely policeman also discreetly avoided facing them, and let the wave of raids pass over his head. The administration was completely paralysed because of the lightning swoops of Vasudeo Balvant in the countryside.

The first assault in the Konkan was launched by the raiders on the village of Nere, four miles from Panvel, on 10th May 1879. They attacked the house of Sitaram Sakharam Godbole, a leading man of Nere. Godbole looked out in darkness through the wooden bars of his door and got frightened when he saw the burning torches in the hands of the men outside. He repaired to the inner hall, collected his family members, and escorted them by the rear door to the adjoining house.

The raiders broke open the door with their axes, and rushed into the house in the unsteady light of the torches. They ransacked the house and bagged a booty valued at about three thousand rupees. They left the house floating the stolen silken *shelas* from their shoulders.

The leading merchant of Nere, Mahadeo Govind Joshi, heard the knocks of the raiders next shifted to his door. The visitors broke open the door and relieved the owner of his valuables worth thousands of rupees.

<sup>1</sup> The *Bombay Gazette*, May 15, 1879.

The visitors then looted some houses of goldsmiths. One of them, Shankar Wachhashet, had been to Panvel for some work. After finishing his work he returned to Nere in the evening; but as he approached Nere he heard the uproar in the village. He, therefore, retraced his steps and concealed himself in a roadside field till the raiders went away.

The raiders looted a dozen more houses before they left Nere at 10 p.m. bagging a substantial booty. They went to the house of a teacher and asked him the whereabouts of the Police Patil. But having been forewarned, Nathu Patil of Nere had already absconded into the neighbouring field to save his life. A villager, Bhagwan Khatri, shinned up a tree for safety. But as the visitors touched the stump of the tree by sheer accident he lost his presence of mind, collapsed to the ground, and sustained a fracture in his arm!

The insurgents passed the night in the forest and next evening, on 11th May 1879, attacked the frightened village of Chikhale. On reaching the village at about 7 p.m. they shouted out to a local resident Ganeshpant Patankar from outside his house; but without response. They then smashed his door open, entered his house and seized a large booty.

They next turned to the residence of a *saucar*, Vishnupant Patankar, who had left it entrusting its charge to his clerk Ganesh Bapuji. Mistaking the clerk for the owner, the raiders tied down his hands, looted the house and left it, bidding "farewell" to "Vishnupant".

The raiders went round the house of Narayan Hari Patankar, raising frightening shouts. The owner hastened upstairs, and climbed down into the cattle-shed at the back side through a window. On forcing their way into the house, the raiders dragged out the clerk and a mason sleeping inside the house and looted the residence. They ultimately left Chikhale, heartily thanking a colleague for the gains and firing a series of gunshots in the air. The raid was over within two and a half hours.

The information of the insurgents about the Konkan villages was minute and unerring. Dumbfounded at the accuracy of the information, the special correspondent of the *Bombay Gazette* publicly bewailed: "... The intelligence department of the 'dacoits' seems to have been efficient."

Two miles away from Shirdhon, flourished the more populated village of Palaspe, where then lived a rich man by name Ramchandra Ganesh *alias* Appasaheb Oze. His father Ganeshpant had efficiently wielded the sceptre of the Dewanship of

Baroda under Mahārāj Khanderao Gaekwar, and had rendered singular service to the British Government by suppressing the anti-British moves in the State during the War of Independence of 1857. The British Government rewarded him for his services with an extensive *jahgir* and robes of honour. After his retirement from the Dewanship of Baroda he lived at Palaspe.

The vast treasure of Sardar Oze was diligently guarded by a batch of armed Gurkhas. His mansion contained fabulous wealth of ornaments and jewellery. At that time a large number of relatives and friends of Sardar Oze had gathered at the place for a marriage ceremony scheduled to be soon celebrated at Palaspe.

After looting Chikhale the insurgents marched on the mansion of Oze shortly before midnight, on 11th May 1879. The chief guard of the mansion, Ganu Ramji Naik, was startled at the mysterious figures in the dark near the mansion. He moved his rifle into position when a bullet fired by the raiders whizzed past his chest. Before he had recovered from the shock another bullet hit his leg. It was followed by a series of gunshots and the guard fell down wounded.

The raiders hurled a shower of stones and brickbats at the wada in order to terrorise the inmates. As they approached nearer, jumping over the wounded body of the guard, they were challenged by a Gurkha named Omkarsing. He fired his gun at them and bent forward to reload it. But the raiders overpowered him, smashed the wicket of the wada and going further inside, attacked its main door.

They rushed inside the wada through the crumbling door when another faithful Gurkha guard of Oze, named Sabasing, blocked their way. Sword in hand he started a deadly combat with the raiders, but was ultimately subdued by them and fell down wounded and unconscious. He was removed to Bombay the next day in the same condition and died soon after. Yet a third Gurkha, Holkar, challenged the insurgents; but they sent him rolling to the ground.

After the complete annihilation of the Gurkha resistance, five or six of the insurgents jumped upon the suspending hanging lamps, the multi-wicked global lights called *handis* in the main hall, removed the candlesticks from inside the globes and moved about in their light. They tore asunder old clothes, soaked the cloth pieces in kerosene oil and made torches out of them.

In the frightful light of the torches Sardar Daulatrao Naik then confronted Appasaheb Oze and stared at him. Appa-



saheb was almost dead with fear. But Daulatrao assured him: "We do not want to hurt you in vain. Give us two thousand rupees, and we shall leave this place without a word!"

Appasaheb said: "I have not got the amount. I am not the owner of the wada."

Daulatrao lowered his demand. "That's all right!" he said, "Give us a thousand rupees! That will be enough. If, however, you still hesitate to give this amount, we shall secure it by force."

Hardly had Daulatrao finished the words, when the Ramoshis flashed their naked swords around their prisoner, raising angry shouts. It was only when Appasaheb agreed to offer them their tribute that their fury was assuaged. They took possession of all the valuables and the safe, as also of the costly silken robes and garments of Oze. They poured down the whole booty comprising of gold, silver, and pearl ornaments and the jewellery in the centre of the inner hall.

The more enthusiastic amongst them dashed on to the kitchen. They opened the cupboards and chinaware containing sweets and preserves which were specially prepared by the ladies of the house for the impending marriage ceremony, and sumptuously feasted on them.

The assembly escorted Appasaheb to the second storey of the mansion. The villagers of Palaspe had mustered strong at a distance. The insurgents pushed Appasaheb to a window and asked him to shout out a warning of retreat to the people. "Otherwise," they added, "they will fall victims to our bullets." Appasaheb warned the villagers accordingly. But the crowd would not disperse. The raiders fired a few shots in the air and the crowd immediately disappeared from the spot.

The visitors invited Appasaheb to a *pansupari* and requested him to convey their good wishes and "Ram Ram" to his brother, Tatyasaheb, who was not at Palaspe. Daulatrao also asked him: "Why don't you too join us?" His query evoked a terrific satirical laughter among the insurgents. Appasaheb made no reply. Daulatrao offered the host *pansupari* from his own tray, and lifting his costly velvet betel-leaf case—*chanchi*—told Appasaheb: "I am taking this *chanchi* with me as a memento of this visit."

The booty which included precious stones like rubies, pearls and jewels, costly nose-rings and earrings, golden *mohurs*, necklaces, costly garments, *shelas*, silver saddles and reins was sorted out and packed. The insurgents then stood to attention in front of the mansion. The more daring and spirited among

them stepped forward and told Appasaheb in a blunt tone: "We are not afraid of the British Government! ('Ingraj Sarkar'!) When we secure the cannons we will definitely march on Poona!" And at the signal from Daulatrao within a moment they went away in a disciplined manner behind their leader. When they emerged out of Palaspe the clock had struck three. They marched past Shirdhon, and left Konkan for the Ghats through the Kalhai pass before the sun illuminated the east.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CONFLAGRATION

THE raid at Palaspe on the opposite coast of Bombay created a panic among the people of Bombay. It prompted the *Native Opinion* to comment: "We are sorry, the Governor should be away from the Presidency at the time of panic—and Bombay was almost panic-stricken when it heard on Tuesday last of the dacoity at Palaspe which is only a few miles from this place."<sup>1</sup>

District after district stood in constant dread of the raids of Vasudeo Balvant and the existence of even the semblance of authority and security in the province was wiped out from the popular mind. The *Bombay Gazette* said: "Major Daniell is up and alive to the difficulties created by the daring dacoits and is roving about in the districts where the administration is either dissipated or paralysed."

The terror created by the raids of Vasudeo Balvant compelled a large rural population to migrate to the cities like Bombay and Poona. Europeans were particularly frightened, and left their countryside abodes for Poona or Bombay. The prevalent alarm and excitement is very well described by the *Bombay Gazette* as follows: "A feeling of extreme uneasiness at the exploits of the dacoits is becoming very general. The people in the city of Poona are greatly alarmed. In the districts the state of affairs is different. Accounts of dacoities continue to be received from all parts. Not a village unprotected by troops appears to be safe. People are beginning to believe that even their wildest threats are capable of fulfilment. Even the Europeans residing in the stations on railway lines have been frightened into sending their wives and children away for safety."<sup>2</sup>

A glimpse of the terror of Vasudeo Balvant felt by the Europeans can be had from the following event at Kalyan. The day after the raid at Palaspe a rumour was afloat at Kalyan that Vasudeo Balvant was going to march on the town that night. The Europeans immediately packed up their luggage and prepared to leave the place. But no passenger train left

<sup>1</sup> The *Native Opinion*, May 18, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> The *Bombay Gazette*, May 19, 1879.

Kalyan till midnight. A goods train was, however, scheduled to leave Kalyan about that time. To the terror-stricken Europeans even the goods train was a boon. On arrival at Kalyan it was crowded to capacity with European men, women and children and then left for Bombay. In cities also Europeans felt unsafe and purchased a large quantity of ammunition for their guns and revolvers. Messrs. Treacher and Company, the chief dealers in arms and ammunition at Poona, completely exhausted their stock of ammunition due to such quick purchase of cartridges by the Europeans.

Even in the midst of the unrest, however, Poona had maintained its flair for novel functions and ceremonies. An elocution competition for women, an ultra-progressive function rather outrageous to our tradition in those days, came off without any incident on 13th May 1879, in the evening, although its organisers had expected some opposition to it any moment. The excitement in the popular mind was only a precursor of the violent thunderstorm which shortly blew over the city the same evening. It raged for a while and then abated. The storm beat down the exasperating heat of the summer and the citizens went to sleep after dinner forgetting for a while the dread of the insurgents.

The whole city was dead asleep. None was awake except the pickets posted to guard the town. Scarcely had the citizens enjoyed their sleep for an hour when at about 11 p.m. they heard a startling alarm: "Fire! It is fire! Help, citizens, help!!" Against the background of the current revolt the fire might have meant anything. And the whole city was thrown into a ferment.

People hurriedly left their beds and swarmed on the terraces of their houses. Some of them also hastened down on the streets, and endeavoured to gather more information about the fire from the crowd speeding in the direction of the fire. Tremendous excitement prevailed in Poona as the fire sirens and bells raised a dreadful alarm.

Within a few minutes platoons of European troops appeared in the streets of Poona, adding to the excitement. Poona had never before witnessed such a large number of European troops marching through the city streets to the accompaniment of band and bugles.

Dame rumour took wings and people whispered to each other: "The followers of Vasudeo Balvant have smuggled themselves into the city and they have set the city on fire; skirmishes have started between them and the Government forces." Others

emphatically asserted: "Vasudeo Balvant himself has not entered the city; but has come up to the city gates. Only his lieutenants have slipped inside and the battle is in progress."

The people and Government were unanimous that the fire was not a chance occurrence. Government groped in the dark as to the number of insurgents in the city. So when Vishrambag Wada was ablaze the Government first ordered European troops to the scene of the fire, instead of sending the fire brigade. The political implication of the fire naturally seized them first.

Eventually, the news that Vishrambag Wada was on fire spread throughout the city. The Vishrambag Wada was built by Bajirao II at a cost of two lakhs, five hundred and forty rupees in 1807, when the Shanwarwada was gutted in a terrific fire. There were three quadrangles in the one-storeyed palace, which was two hundred and sixty feet broad and eight hundred and fifteen feet long. The halls on the ground floor of the Wada were open on all sides and its wooden pillars were made of costly wood. The Wada housed the Government High School.

On receipt of the news that the historical Wada was ablaze the Acting City Magistrate, Mr. Richardson, immediately hastened to the scene of the fire. Mr. Richardson also wrote to the Colonel Commanding H.M.'s 4th Rifles for a Company of the regiment and to Major Trueman for European troops.

In eight more minutes the fire engines of H.M.'s 75th Highlanders under Lieutenant Christopher turned out with their fire-fighting equipment. Two Cantonment Staff Sergeants Murray and Tobin also accompanied the party. The Highlanders crossed the distance of three miles between their barracks and the Vishrambag Wada with remarkable speed.

The fire attracted a large crowd which jostled and elbowed to go as near the blaze as possible although its heat was so intense that it was impossible to approach much closer to the Wada. The police and military had an anxious time in controlling the onward surge of the vividly illuminated crowd. Columns of smoke and flame belched from the burning palace. The firemen opened their water hoses over the fire in specially big spouts. But much of the water evaporated into thin air before reaching the flames on account of the severe heat of the blaze. Within a short time, however, more fire engines raced on to the scene and redoubling the efforts, brought the fire under control.

A salvaging party of railway engineers under Executive Engi-

neer Davidson also worked vigorously, pulling down the blazing portions of the Wada which bridged its safer parts. The engineers succeeded in preventing the fire from spreading to wider areas.

But by 2-30 p.m. when the fire was brought under control the entire palace excepting a central square was gutted. Twenty-five fire engines worked for three hours for achieving this success.

The police, military and the fire service personnel were about to go home when fresh shrill shouts rent the air. "The Budhwar Wada too has caught fire! Help, citizens, help!" The crowd immediately hastened to the other scene of the fire hardly two furlongs away. Both the palaces housed Government institutions and offices and the citizens wondered how both the Government palaces were ablaze within a few hours.

The Budhwar Wada with its gorgeous magnificence unrivalled by any other building in Poona was a three-storeyed palace. It had a tiny square adjacent to another spacious square and it occupied a hundred and fifty feet of length with one hundred and forty feet breadth. The palace was built in 1813 by Bajirao II. On its broad beams a man could easily sleep. Bajirao II held his offices in Budhwar Wada until they were closed down by the British in 1818 and replaced by their own. The palace was situated on the open square in front of the Pharaskhana, the present headquarters of the Poona police. It then housed the Government law courts, both civil and military, Mamlatdar's *kacheri*, the city police offices, city post-office and the Native General Library.

Entrusting the waning fire of the Vishrambag Wada to a skeleton fire brigade and troops, the officers and the rest of the military along with the magistrates, commanders and sergeants rushed to the Budhwar Wada with the remaining fire engines.

The Budhwar Wada was wrapped in rising flames. Its burning embers scattered along a broad column of air preventing nearer approach from the front of the Wada. The Highlanders, therefore, proceeded to the back side and scaled up their ladders to the upper floors. They hurled down almost all the court records and the money in the Government treasury as also the post-office records in baskets sliding up and down. The remaining records were gutted by the fire by this time.

The flames spiralled higher and higher. Water hoses got choked up with coal dirt and some fire engines were also disabled. The flames soon touched the imposing clock tower on the Wada, and as the clock struck three the tower collapsed with a crash on the road below, killing a cartman on the spot.

Two hundred troops under Major Mackenzie now pulled

down the adjacent houses in order to localise the fire. The disabled fire engines were replaced by those from the Cantonment, and enough water was made available by opening the water mains from Khadakwasla. After an hour, the fire was brought under control. When, however, the morning came the fire engines were still combating the dying fire.

What was the state of Poona during the period? Europeans were panic-stricken and passed the fearful moments of the night in continuous dread of an invasion of the city by Vasudeo Balvant. He did not, however, come to Poona that night. The city was "one scene of turmoil and uproar. Traffic was at a standstill. The population was in such a state of fear and alarm that it readily believed any report. No one knew what would happen next."<sup>3</sup>

The authorities were unable to trace out the culprits immediately. Within two more days, the mystery deepened when the Phadke wada, the next largest wada in Poona, was also ablaze. The fire was, however, extinguished immediately. Four days afterwards, the Holkar wada was also on fire; but the fire was put out without much effort. Next Sunday some godowns were, however, completely burnt down.

The Government naturally suspected that some of the active collaborators of Vasudeo Balvant were in Poona and set in motion the steam roller of repression and investigation to trace them out! The harassment and persecution resorted to by the Government had no precedent in the whole history of the British occupation of that proud city.

<sup>3</sup> *The Bombay Gazette*, May 16, 1879.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ECHOES AND REPERCUSSIONS

THE city of Poona was transformed into a huge prison after the terrible conflagration of 13th May 1879. Within two days of the fires the *Bombay Gazette* wrote a provocative editorial, in the course of which it said: "The rumours that have been flying about Western India for the past few months have received ample confirmation. The rumours ascribed to certain members of the Brahmin community of Poona a ridiculous ambition on their part to renew in Western India those tactics by which Shivajee in days gone by succeeded eventually in sapping the power of the then mighty Mogul Empire."

It asserted that the fires surely pointed to more than the mere efforts of half-starved roving bands of ignorant dacoits and said that even in Shivaji's times "predatory bands at first small and insignificant in numbers began to rove about the districts; but soon so increased in boldness and in power that they brought anarchy upon ever-extending tracts of the country, and succeeded at last in establishing the famous and dreaded Maratha system of wholesale plundering by means of mighty armies."

It added: "A little martial law would do Poona a great deal of good. . . . The Mutiny attained its dangerous proportions mainly because we ignored the efforts that were then at the beginning made. . . . The mysterious fires that in those times lighted up the country received but little attention until it was too late. There must be no mistake of that sort in Poona now."<sup>1</sup>

The *Bombay Gazette* followed its outburst with a vilifying comment in its next issue. It said that the natives of Poona rendered no assistance, but laughed and joked at the time of the fires and that there had been a regular crusade against the Government for some time past at the meetings of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha. It asserted that some "Poona Brahmins" were at the root of the seditious agitation then in progress.

The word "Poona Brahmin" signified a man of anti-British inclinations in the opinion of British rulers in later years when Lokamanya Tilak led the nation. The word, however, had originated during the above period.

<sup>1</sup> The *Bombay Gazette*, May 15, 1879.



Sarvajanik Kaka wrote a spirited reply to the *Bombay Gazette* and said: "Just from the commencement of the fire (at Vishram-bag, Wada) the native residents came out in force, exerted themselves to work at the Municipal fire engines, and prevented the fire from spreading to other buildings. . . . Some of us removed the benches and other furniture belonging to the (Government) High School." The letter was sent over the signatures of several gentlemen of Poona. It silenced the mischievous propaganda of the *Bombay Gazette*.<sup>2</sup>

People made various conjectures about the origin of the fires. Some believed that the Budhwar Wada was set on fire to effect the release of a famous dacoit, Hari Naik, who was then in the custody inside the Wada. Others thought that the fires were planned with the intention of harassing the Government by destroying its records. Yet some others thought that Vasudeo Balvant had burnt down the Wadas as they both were now Government property.

The authorities in Poona adopted precautionary measures the next day. On 14th May, military pickets were posted at strategic points. The Government buildings were guarded by armed constables with their rifles cocked. And mounted swars of European Cavalry patrolled the streets of the city. The city of Poona was practically under military rule.

There was a thick rumour that Vasudeo Balvant entered the city and slipped out undetected, evading the armed guards. To prevent the unrestricted movements of the rebel leader, the military received strict orders on 14th May, not to allow anybody to enter Poona after 8 p.m. nor to allow anyone to leave Poona before 4 a.m. A dusk-to-dawn curfew was clamped down on the city the same day. Curfew on account of political unrest was resorted to by the British Government in India for the first time during the times of Vasudeo Balvant.

The poisonous contention of the *Bombay Gazette* about the Poona citizens was refuted by the *Times of India*. The *Times of India* denied the existence of any plot at the root of the fires. It, however, whole-heartedly endorsed the suggestion that all illegal activities should be put down with a strong hand. It concluded: "The fires resemble rather the attempts made a few years ago in London by a few American Irishmen who thought they could upset the British Empire by blowing down the wall of a prison in Clerkenwell."<sup>3</sup>

Strangely enough two Indian journals namely the *Native*

<sup>2</sup> The *Bombay Gazette*, May 19, 1879.

<sup>3</sup> The *Times of India*, May 16, 1879.

*Opinion* and the *Indu Prakash* ridiculed the will displayed by the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant. But in this, they only degraded themselves in the estimation of patriotic Indians.

National consciousness was so weak in India that quite a few loyalist Indian newssheets described Vasudeo Balvant as a fiendish soul.

The rigorous precautionary measures adopted by the Government subjected the city of Poona to great hardships. Late-comers, on their way home after 8 p.m. were detained at police stations, and had to face a barrage of questions from the officers on duty before they were allowed to go home.

The measures aimed at preventing the free movements of Vasudeo Balvant in the city. And the Government was not acting on unfounded suspicion. Numerous persons in Poona were mentioned as his collaborators rendering assistance to him in many ways.

The conflagration at Poona flashed the flames of Vasudeo Balvant's revolt not only all over India, but also beyond the oceans, right up to London! *The Times* featured the news of the Poona fires within six days of the fires and followed it with a dispatch from its Calcutta correspondent reporting the raid at Palaspe. The report began with the following paragraph: "Dacoity or robbery by armed gangs is assuming alarming proportions in the Deccan, especially in the Poona District. For some time past, bands of dacoits have been scouring and committing a series of daring attacks on houses and villages. They seem to form a part of a regular organisation under the command of one Wassudeo Balwant, lately a clerk in the Financial Department."<sup>4</sup>

The revolt of Vasudeo Balvant became the absorbing topic of the day in political circles in London after the Poona conflagration and the news about its progress hit the headlines of newspapers published in London. The Reuters broadcast to the whole world the news of the Poona fires and also transmitted abroad further reports about the Deccan revolt at some length. The London papers wrote editorials on the unrest. The name of Vasudeo Balvant began to resound in the heart of London.

*The Times* concluded its first editorial with the observation: "The manifesto addressed to the Governor of Bombay resembles the insolence of Irish Ribandism,<sup>5</sup> speaks of organising "another mutiny" and invents as its patron a mysterious potentate, on

<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, May 19, 1879.

<sup>5</sup> The Riband was an Irish secret organisation having a hand in the revolutionary acts of the agriculturists.

which it bestows the name of Shivaji the Great, founder of the Mahratta Empire.”<sup>5</sup>

The Indian press also devoted many of its columns to the news of the revolt. Its comments are interesting as reflecting the reaction of contemporary educated classes to the Deccan revolt. Only a few extracts from the editorials of leading and influential journals are, however, given below for the sake of brevity.

The *Deccan Herald* of Poona wrote: “The Deccan dacoits do not plead poverty as an excuse for what they are doing. They say they are stealing for the purpose of raising a rebellion in the country because their fellow countrymen are starving. It is out of friendship for the poor that they are stealing all.”<sup>6</sup>

The *Indian Daily News*, Calcutta, in the course of a lengthy editorial made the following comments: “The people of Satara and Poona have a history of dacoities ripening into successful rebellions, a living history repeated in their folk-songs and in the folklore. It is an almost nightly amusement to listen to tales of great robbers becoming great warriors and those great warriors becoming great princes. There is a certain amount of admiration felt for that. For they represent the wrongs of the ryots. If then Wasudeo Balwant can claim to have struck the *saucars* and landlords he will claim the confidence of the peasantry, that is, of a body of men, hardy, brave and daring and familiar with the warfare in the hills and of robbery in the plains.

“It is the history of the peasantry amongst whom this man is working which must be looked to, for a correct comprehension of the way in which the prevalence of dacoity has suddenly assumed so threatening a political magnitude.

“His (Wasudeo Balwant’s) true character has not yet been comprehended. If he be capable of half-burning the capital of Maharashtra and of filling all the country with terror and the expectation of his name (the reward offered for his arrest) is far too little. . . . The excitement in the Bombay Presidency will speedily spread.

“The peasantry of Poona and Satara are a class with whom the elements of an outbreak may be said to have always smouldered, ready to break when the circumstances of their daily life should be so hard to bear. But that a clerk in a Government office should detect that and should at once turn it to his account proves that he is no common man.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, May 19, 1879.

<sup>6</sup> *The Deccan Herald*, May 20, 1879.

<sup>7</sup> The editorial in *The Indian Daily News* was written on or about 19th May, 1879.

The *Statesman* of Calcutta said: "It is not strange that the news of recent incendiarism at Poona should have excited the keenest interest and anxiety throughout the country. There is something ominous in the mere word 'incendiarism' in this country, where conflagrations have come to be recognised as symptoms of sedition, if not precursors of serious rebellion."

The *Statesman* differed from other papers on the genesis of the Deccan trouble and asserted that if the unrest was not counteracted with the twin remedies of suppression and reform it would envelope the entire Hindustan within a short time.<sup>8</sup>

The *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore wrote: "The dacoits' manifesto gives expression very fairly to a spirit of discontent and even sedition which is only too common in several of the Deccan districts." The paper warned the Government that "the seditious persons would naturally seize the opportunity of a time of distress for the purpose of bringing the Government into general discredit," and suggested: "Government must institute a most searching inquiry and inflict the utmost penalty the law allows upon the ringleaders in these disgraceful scenes."<sup>9</sup>

While the Indian press was thus struck with the impact of the revolt, on 17th May, at night, Major Daniell received the news of the return of the insurgents under Sardar Daulatrao Naik on the hill range called Mahipal hills near Talegaon in the Maval region. He also learnt that they had defiantly repelled a police attack.

Major Daniell drafted an additional military force and marched on the insurgents. The insurgents had by now abandoned the Mahipal hills and ascended a loftier precipice called Thisubai hill. Daniell scattered his force on the Karinda and Kaktus hills, and by four o'clock on 18th May 1879, the battle began between the rival forces on these hills.

Daulatrao realised the desperate situation and as the Government forces advanced weeding out bushes and trees to find out the insurgents, he ordered his followers to fire. Their gunfire showered death from the hill top on the troops below.

Daniell had little idea of the daring offensive of the insurgents at this stage. But he was a cool-headed man of patience and pursuit. He gave up the track and conveyed his men eastwards to the other side of the Mahipal hills.

The insurgents were closely watching this move. They also turned their guns in the eastern direction and began to unload

<sup>8</sup> The *Statesman*, May 21, 1879.

<sup>9</sup> The *Civil and Military Gazette*, May 20, 1879.

them on the enemy. Major Daniell drove up his soldiers with words of courage on the Thisubai hill which sheltered the raiders.

As the darkness extended over the slopes of the hill Daulatrao saw the consequence with foresight. For his men began to fall one by one and their number began to dwindle. One of his followers, thereupon, thought discretion to be the better part of valour, and cried out to him amidst the excitement of the battle: "Naik! How long would we carry on like this? Go forward and meet the Saheb. Don't be the cause of the death of us all!"

Daulatrao was riled and the words of cowardice pierced his heart like a sharpened dagger. So resting the butt of his gun on the ground, he replied in solemn determination: "That is impossible! If time comes I would rather die by the shot of the Saheb and embrace death! But I'll never go to meet the Saheb or fall alive into his hands!"<sup>10</sup>

With these heroic words Daulatrao marched ahead on the Thisubai hill. But within an hour the insurgents had to beat a retreat. Daniell had by then advanced much nearer. Daulatrao discarded his gun and took out a pistol. The Major stood beyond a wild tree in front of Daulatrao. A bullet shot off Daulatrao's revolver and breezed past the chin of Daniell. He sustained a slight injury and was staggered. But he soon recovered from the shock. No sooner had Daulatrao realised the futility of his shot than Major Daniell himself fired four straight shots at Daulatrao at point-blank range with fatal consequences. Daulatrao collapsed to the ground, fighting on the battlefield in the cause of his master and the country. As he fell, he was still shouting encouragement to his men and victory to his country, and then rolling on the battlefield breathed his last!

After the fall of Daulatrao the insurgents ran away in confusion in all directions, leaving behind their guns and other weapons and the precious booty brought from the Konkan. The booty was valued at over a lakh of rupees and consisted of currency notes, jewels, pearls and innumerable ornaments. Major Daniell, arms akimbo, lazily glanced for a while at the immense booty with strange satisfaction, and then taking it with him, he left the Thisubai hill for his camp.

Patriotic India heard the news of the marvellous exploits of Vasudeo Balvant; and the Government of his escape through every trying skirmish. It was the same story with his raids in

<sup>10</sup> Confession of Umia Tukaram made on 22nd May 1879, before Mr. Campbell, First Class Magistrate of Poona.

the month of March, the raids in the Konkan, the Poona fires and now the battle on the Thisubai Hill! The Government was dismayed and intrigued at these escapes of the revolutionary leader.

The *Bombay Gazette* editorially observed: "The Brahmin Wassudeo Bulwunt was known to his men as 'Maharaj' and the whole progress and career of that individual leads us to believe that he was only acting as the agent of some Central Committee sitting probably in Poona."<sup>11</sup>

The fantastic assumption of the journal, however, evoked a telling reply from the *Times of India* which said: "There was no cause for loud shrieks of panic and alarm by those who look upon every native as a traitor and every educated native as a Guy Fawkes in disguise." Saying that after the reckless farfaronade of the *Bombay Gazette* something more startling was expected to come to light, the paper said that as a matter of fact nothing startling was revealed and proceeded to say: "Three-fourths of the population of Poona are Brahmins, and the incendiaries would naturally belong to the most numerous caste. . . . A fire in Dublin would probably be caused by an Irishman. Still this would not justify calling all the inhabitants of Dublin traitors and all Irishmen Fenians."

Four famous personages lived in Poona at this time of crisis. Vasudeo Balvant had intimate contacts with the Sarvajanik Sabha, and Sarvajanik Kaka had to dispel the Government suspicion of the Sabha's complicity in the upheaval. Kaka led a deputation to the Collector of Poona. During the interview with him Kaka assured him that the deputationists condemned the incendiarism and loved the peace of the city; but also pointed out to the Collector that it was unjust to charge the Sabha with sedition and love of unrest as was being done by interested parties.

The Government also frowned upon Madhavrao Ranade. A strange rumour was afloat in Poona that Vasudeo Balvant sought Ranade's advice at night on the progress of the revolt. Ranade was the last man to support any rebellion. Yet the gossipers of the city persisted in repeating the canard.

The third celebrated personage living in Poona was Annasaheb Patwardhan, afterwards an elderly revered person to Lokamanya Tilak. Patwardhan was junior to Vasudeo Balvant by two years. He was also in the prime of his youth. With a countenance reflecting his uncommon intelligence and an attractive well-built body, Annasaheb Patwardhan was fair-

<sup>11</sup> The *Bombay Gazette*, May 22, 1879.

complexioned. He was resolute by nature and a man of high idealism. He had taken the higher degrees both in law and medicine, an achievement with possibly a very few parallels in his days. He was known to the later generation as an ascetic and was called Maharshi. But in his younger days he was known to have been deeply interested in revolutionary ideology in politics.

Patwardhan had great sympathy for the rebellious disposition of Vasudeo Balvant. He had given shelter to the exiled patriots of 1857 and afterwards became a patriarch to Tilak's generation. It was he who first established the nationalist press in Maharashtra with his Marathi journal the *Kiran* and his English weekly the *Deccan Star* before Tilak roared through the *Kesari*. The papers rendered great service to the country.

The ancient mansion of the Patwardhans, which stands beyond the "broken tower" of the Shanwarwada at Poona, was the residence of this sage. Vasudeo Balvant was a frequent visitor to Patwardhan and had prolonged discussions with him, on his plan of revolt as both of them cast despairing glances at the faded glory of the Shanwarwada. No wonder, therefore, that Annasaheb Patwardhan was constantly dogged by the detectives during the period.

Tilak also was in Poona when the Government repression was running amuck in Poona. Evidently Tilak felt elated at the courage with which the city of Poona faced the Government repression. This elation of his reflected itself in his writing when later on he publicly eulogised the tenacity and courage shown by the Poona citizens during this period. While deprecating the equanimity with which the people seemed to have tolerated the insulting outbursts of Lord Harris, the Governor of Bombay, against the people in the Deccan he said: "It is not a good omen that the citizens of Poona, who brought to their knees a haughty Governor like Richard Temple, an anti-Hindu journalist like the editor of the *Bombay Gazette*, the narrow-minded collector like Moor and ungenerous Councillor like Ashburner" (all of them in office during the times of Vasudeo Balvant) "should calmly hear the outburst of men like Lord Harris that the people of the Deccan have lost all sense in them!"<sup>12</sup>

Patriotic Indians, however, did not falter in praising the selfless spirit of Vasudeo Balvant in as explicit a manner as it was then possible. The editorial in the *Deccan Star* patronised by

<sup>12</sup> The *Kesari*, October 16, 1894: "It should happen! But will you do it?"

Annasaheb Patwardhan and edited by Madhavrao Namjoshi, later on a close friend of Tilak, displays this admiration felt by the nation for Vasudeo Balvant.

The *Deccan Star* wrote: "... The influence of English education upon our minds is that we have begun to understand what we have, what we ought to have and what we have not. Our hearty thanks, therefore, are due to such noble souls that have shown the self-sacrificing spirit for their country's cause. Let it clearly be understood that we do not sympathise with the cause" (of dacoity) "Mr. V. B. Phadke is alleged to have undertaken. . . . But we certainly sympathise with his spirit of self-sacrifice. He was a clerk in the Military Finance Office drawing a handsome salary. He has left a young wife behind to be taken care of, either by her parents or his shadowy friends! If the pluck and self-sacrificing spirit that this Vasudevrao is heard to possess had been directed to some other good cause, such as that of founding a colony, shall he not have been praised—certainly extolled?"

The tremor of the political earthquake in the Deccan was now increasingly felt in London. A correspondent under the pen-name "Justice" wrote a letter to *The Times* demanding that adequate measures should immediately be taken to stamp out the seditious trends in India. The *Morning Post* and other prominent newspapers also wrote lengthy articles on the political development in India. Not content with the comments of these papers, protagonists of peace and tranquillity in the British Empire in India caused a question to be asked in the British Parliament. Citing the reports of the revolt in the British press, the Earl of Carnarvan asked the Secretary of State for India in the House of Lords: "Are the reports correct? For if true, this is a most serious state of things—one almost unprecedented in the recent Indian history. Can the noble Viscount throw any light on the matter?"

The Secretary of State for India, Viscount Cranbrook, in reply to the question said: "The Deccan has without doubt been subjected to great distress for some weeks past, and I have in private letters received accounts of that distress. It is also true to a certain extent that dacoits have committed robberies and other outrages; but I have no knowledge of the particular transactions reported within the last few days. . . . I telegraphed this morning to the Governor of Bombay asking for information. But I have not yet received any reply. . . . But the latest



accounts which I received by last mail were that things seemed to be settling down." <sup>13</sup>

In reply to the telegram mentioned above, the Governor of Bombay had sent the following telegram to the Secretary of State for India: "Your Lordship's telegram regarding Deccan trouble. Recent dacoities occurred either side above and below mountains, western border, Poona and Satara Districts. . . . Dacoits are hill-men, hardy daring characters, led by educated persons. Number not exceeding three hundred. Steep hills and thick jungles favour their operations. Detachments of troops despatched and special pursuing parties under European officers. Leader not caught but systematically pursued. The incendiaries probably intended to annoy the Government. No sign of agrarian trouble."

Within three days, Mr. Hanbury asked the Under-Secretary of State for India in the House of Commons: "Is it true that there has been renewal of popular disturbances accompanied by incendiary fires in the Bombay Presidency? To what cause is it attributed and what steps the Government have taken to carry out the pledge, given three years ago, about the measures for the relief of the agricultural population in the Deccan?"

The Under-Secretary of State for India, Mr. Stanhope, replied: "The Secretary of State telegraphed the other day with a view to obtaining the latest information on the subject, and with the permission of the House I will read the reply of the Governor of Bombay."

After reading the telegram from the Governor of Bombay quoted earlier Mr. Stanhope said: "As regards the last question of the Honourable Member, the subject has been most carefully considered and a Bill mainly based upon suggestions sent out by the Secretary of State-in-Council has been prepared by the Government of Bombay and is now under the consideration of the Government of India (Hear; Hear)." <sup>14</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant was planning his next move when he read the reports of the repercussions of his revolt in London. The plan was destined to fail. But when political observers came to know it they exclaimed: "More terrible events would have taken place had the plan of Vasudeo Balvant succeeded!"

<sup>13</sup> Proceedings of the House of Lords, May 20, 1879.

<sup>14</sup> Proceedings of the House of Commons, May 23, 1879.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE UNDERGROUND REVOLUTIONARY

THE excitement caused by the raids in the Konkan and the Poona fires was heightened by the statements of the Poona incendiaries Krishnaji Narayan Ranade and his son Keshav Ranade. They said that they were charged with the task of setting the buildings on fire by three rebels whom they met on the Parvati road a few days before. They further said that the rebels gave them ornaments and money for the purpose, threatening them with dire consequences if they refused to set the buildings on fire. The episode naturally was linked with Vasudeo Balvant who led the revolt.

The wheel of Government machinery turned without a pause. The Government was dominated by a fickle-minded person like Sir Richard Temple. The suspects in the case of incendiarism were the namesakes of Madhavrao Ranade. Acting on his impulse, the Governor, in utter disregard of the convention requiring sanction of the High Court to transfers of judicial officers, summarily transferred Madhavrao Ranade from Poona to Dhulia; for the High Court was then closed for summer vacation, and Sir Richard could brook no delay in the implementation of his decision.

Ranade's close associates told him that the Government did not mean well. He should, therefore, apply for postponement of the transfer till after the summer on the ground that the hot spell at Dhulia would be injurious to his health. Ranade, however, declined to do so. He said: "As long as I want to serve them I would not like to offer excuses. . . . I would rather resign and become free."<sup>1</sup>

Ranade added: "If the Government is harbouring any suspicion against me mere suspicion would not put me to any loss. The suspicion would gradually disappear and the Government itself would eventually realise its error!"<sup>2</sup>

On going to Dhulia Ranade would not get his mail in time. When he got it some of the letters seemed to have been opened and repasted in transit. The mail included letters bearing the signature of Vasudeo Balvant. They reported the progress of

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Ramabai Ranade, *Some Recollections of our Life* (Marathi), p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> V. B. Ranade, *Life of Ranade* (Marathi), p. 23.

the revolt, and the assistance in men and arms secured by him for the purpose. Ranade was too shrewd to be tricked and saw through the game. He forwarded all the letters to the Police Sub-Inspector of Dhulia. This dignified behaviour of Ranade filled the district officials with shame for their mean tactics, and the Assistant Collector of Dhulia in the end apologised to him while disclosing the truth of the fabricated correspondence.

Ranade's biographer has arrived at the following conclusion regarding Ranade's opinion about Vasudeo Balvant, after examining the contemporary literature reflecting Ranade's opinions. He says: "Although Madhavrao did not approve of the means adopted by Phadke he fully appreciated the patriotism of Phadke. Phadke had not embarked on the project of the revolt for selfish ends. He kicked off his service which was the only means of his livelihood, set his home on fire, and reduced his wife and family members to the state of beggars. But in doing all this, he was actuated by the noble sentiments of patriotism, and the enormous sacrifice he made with a valiant heart cannot be ignored. He was a patriot and Maharashtra must always lovingly cherish his memory."<sup>3</sup>

It would have been quite natural for a moderate leader like Ranade to denounce Vasudeo Balvant with a view to ingratiating himself with the Government. But he did not do so and suffered in silence, always admiring the innate patriotism of Vasudeo Balvant. This attitude of Ranade displayed a typical facet of the Maharashtrian patriotism, which brushes aside political differences in ideology and holds in high esteem the underlying love of the country displayed by patriots following different politics.

The incendiaries subsequently retracted their statements, and told the Sessions Court that there had been a discrepancy of quite a few thousand rupees in the accounts of the book depot housed in Budhwar Wada and they, therefore, set the Wada on fire in order to destroy the account books and the evidence of the discrepancy. A solitary fire to Budhwar Wada would have aroused suspicion of some such motive of the culprits. So they simultaneously set ablaze Vishrambag Wada also, exploiting the troubled times of the revolt to their advantage. For people would then attribute the fires to the insurgents.

When Vasudeo Balvant read the report of the Poona conflagration he was at Gangapur. He had no hand in the fires.

<sup>3</sup> Prof. N. R. Phatak, *Life of Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade* (Marathi), pp. 321-322.

When he heard the news he exclaimed: "The buildings have been burnt to no purpose. But it is good that the Government has sustained a loss."

Although Vasudeo Balvant had not engineered the fires they undoubtedly were rendered possible by his revolt. The incendiary, Keshav Ranade, was a member of his secret society. In fact the Educational Inspector disbelieved the discrepancy in the accounts of the book depot, as none was found in January 1879 during the inspection. It is, therefore, possible to conclude that the fires might have been lighted to embarrass the Government. Keshav Ranade might not have disclosed the names of any of his companions once his fate in any case was sealed.

That the Government seriously suspected that there were more instigators behind the fires is evident from the following opinion of Sir Richard Temple. He says: "... The deed was perpetrated for the sake of doing mischief to the Government and must have instigators undetected, who were far more important than the wretched man who was caught and punished. This event was certainly fraught with some political significance."<sup>4</sup>

People generally assumed the presence of Vasudeo Balvant in the raid at Palaspur and other skirmishes. But the assumption was not correct. For after looting Chandkhed, Vasudeo Balvant explained the next move to Daulatrao and returned to Poona, intending to join his men at Navlakh Umbre. But his pre-occupations in Poona prevented his arrival at Navlakh Umbre in time, he missed his rendezvous, and Daulatrao left Navlakh Umbre for the Konkan without waiting for Vasudeo Balvant. Daulatrao was not able to meet his master again and died on the Thisubai Hill.

Vasudeo Balvant heard the news of the death of Daulatrao also at Gangapur. He was deeply grief-stricken when he heard the news. He shed tears and said: "Daulatrao was my right-hand man, a Sardar of the first rank and was a hero. I had full faith in him. What pleasant times had I passed in his company while living with him in the hills!" Vasudeo Balvant cursed Major Daniell who was so debased and cruel as to shoot down "one so brave," and exclaimed in despair as tears rolled down his cheeks: "What has Daniell gained by killing Daulatrao?"

From past experience Vasudeo Balvant had realised that many of the Ramoshis grabbed a part of the booty and yet clamoured for their salary. Only constant searches would have put a stop

<sup>4</sup> Sir Richard Temple, *Men and Events of My Time in India*, p. 470.

to such double-dealing. He, therefore, turned sceptical of the success of his plan with the help of such men.

He had drawn a detailed plan of simultaneous risings all over India. For that purpose he had decided to depute his trusted emissaries to different parts of the country, months in advance. Such risings would have taken the Government by surprise. The mails could then have been stopped; railway lines and telegraph wires cut. With the stoppage of communications jails could have been broken and thrown open. Long-term convicts in the jails could have been won over to the revolutionary side. Nothing would have been known as regards the strength and whereabouts of the insurgents, and thousands of ignorant people would have joined the uprising. It would have been a peculiar phenomenon, and the task of driving the British out of India and establishing an *Indian Republic* could have been fully accomplished. These were the broad lines on which Vasudeo Balvant had drawn his plans.

But before stepping further he wished to make sure of the ground under his feet. And the Ramoshis could not offer him enough reliance in his project.

His shattered health added to his disappointment. The strain on his body would be obvious from the following note in his diary about a day's routine of his: "Since morning, Gopalrao's legs are paining. I also fell down on the way. I thought men had come to arrest us. I, therefore, ran away; but again fell on the road, which injured me much. I slept under a tree and rose early in the morning, when I was suffering from fever and the pain in my foot was unbearable. Daulatrao informed me that the men were going away with the booty. I began to think, 'How will the work be accomplished with such men?' The men left, while we slept under an Umbra tree."<sup>5</sup>

Temporarily frustrated, Vasudeo Balvant felt an urge for securing the divine blessings for his plan. A revolutionary's emotional mind often seeks this assistance and thinks of renunciation if success evades him. Vasudeo Balvant, therefore, resolved to go to the famous sacred place of Shree Shaila Mallikarjun in the Kurnul District and pray there for the divine favour. He also resolved to sacrifice himself by cutting his neck and offering it to the deity if he were not to succeed in securing the favour. This resolve he made on 2nd April 1879, at Poona.

He had accordingly left Poona in the early morning, on 3rd April, and reached Ooruli on foot on his way to Sholapur. He

<sup>5</sup> Diary of Vasudeo Balvant, April 1, 1879.

went to Kepur, had there the *darshan* of a saint named Mohoni Bawa, and proceeded to Sholapur by train, thence to Dudhni and further on to Gangapur where he reached on 5th April 1879.

On reaching Gangapur, the despair in his mind began to wane. Entering the temple of Dattatraya there, he lay prostrate before the deity, and worshipped it by offering it gold and silver. As he came out of the temple the temple priest asked for the costly shawl on his person. Vasudeo Balvant told him that it was the only shawl with him. But if the priest were to come to Poona he would give him as many shawls as he wanted. Generosity had not forsaken Vasudeo Balvant even in adversity.

On 6th April, prior to Vasudeo Balvant's departure for Shahabad, the charitably disposed Princess of Kurundwad gave a dinner-party to the pilgrims at Gangapur. Vasudeo Balvant went to the dinner-party for a change. But did not relish the food as he seldom went to dine at the houses of other people.

Vasudeo Balvant left Gangapur on 7th April, and after crossing a distance of ten miles reached Shahabad with its houses of woodless stone walls. On 8th April he entrained for the Krishna river. On his way he visited several villages. "The guns at Nargadi are good; one 20 hands long," says a note in his diary. Weapons always attracted his attention.

He visited many monasteries on the way which led him through dried-up barren countryside on the border of the Nizam's territory. He bathed in a roadside stream, cooked his food under a tree and rested in a temple or a dormitory in the company of monks and travellers, giving much of his money in charity.

He was profoundly affected by the plight of the famine-stricken, homeless people at Kurnul, and exclaimed that it was "better to die rather than see the miserable sight of people starving to death." <sup>6</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant had discarded the warrior's dress; but had retained his favourite sword with him. The all-embracing sky above was his shelter and the never-ending tiresome meandering road his monotonous path.

Shree Shaila Mallikarjun is a *mahakshetra* and the most ancient and sacred in South India. "As the Krishna winds its way eastwards to the sea, it forms some seventy miles below Kurnul, a sharp loop northwards, flowing through a wide and steep-sided trench of nearly a thousand feet in depth. Here, in the heart of the uninhabited Nallamalla forest, surrounded by rugged hills and desolate fever-haunted belt of land, rises a

<sup>6</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

plateau 1,563 feet high, overlooking the river, on which stands the famous Shiva-temple of Shri Shaila."<sup>7</sup>

The place was quite enchanting. The entrance to the plateau was by the Kailasdwar. The temple enclosure occupies "an oblong space, 660 feet by 510, surrounded by thick walls varying from 20 to 26 feet in height, built in large hewn blocks of greyish stone exactly squared and laid together and elaborately sculptured with a profusion of accurately designed figures of elephants, horses, tigers, hunters, warriors and *yogis* as well as numerous scenes from the Hindu epics and religious books. In the centre of this enclosure is the square temple of Mallikarjun, the chief deity, the walls and roof (of the temple) being covered with gilded brass plates, presented by Krishna Dev, the victorious Raja of Vijayanagar. There is a smaller temple dedicated to Shiva's consort. A flight of stone steps, built by a Vijayanagar Queen, leads down from the plateau to the bed of the Krishna called Patal-Ganga and a ford called Nila-Ganga, a little below, both of which are considered as sacred bathing places."<sup>8</sup>

The sacred place beckoned Vasudeo Balvant in his depressed mental condition as the last place of prayer for the triumph of his cause. He had fever and he was in low spirits. He reached the temple of Shree Shaila Mallikarjun on 18th April 1879.

Vasudeo Balvant embarked on his grim penance on 20th April 1879, to invoke the divine aid through special prayers. He went on a complete fast from that day and ceased to take even water. Sitting entranced in meditation in front of the deity, he decided to wait for the desired result for only seven days or else to sacrifice his life to the deity.

Preparing himself to bid good-bye to this world, he began to write the first part of his autobiography from 19th April 1879 and finished it within two days. At the end of the second part of his autobiography which he finished on 25th April 1879, he asked his countrymen to forgive him. "Oh ye all Indians and my Brethren! Pardon me for the non-fulfilment of my promise," he said. "But God alone knows that I did all for your good. I fall at your feet in salutation for the last time. I am going to sacrifice my own life for your welfare and enter the Court of God as a *vakeel* for you! I have done nothing superhuman in this. The sage Dadhichi also had given his very bones for the good of Gods! I too pray to God with folded hands that He

<sup>7</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji And His Times*, p. 296.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 296-297.

may take my life, but make you all happy; and salute you for the last time."<sup>9</sup>

Even the stones would stir up with sobs at the touch of one such exalted farewell radiating the highest sentiments of patriotism! Vasudeo Balvant had grown weaker and weaker. His voice had sunk low. He was running temperature and had not taken food for the past seven days. On 26th April 1879, he unsheathed his sword and tried to cut off his head with it in front of the deity as a humble offering to her to fulfil his vow.

But the impending tragedy was averted by the intervention of a Telangi Brahmin who rushed to the scene in the nick of time. His name was Mallappa. He resided in the temple as a worshipper of the deity—Mai Saheb. He had scented the dreadful resolve of the distinguished visitor, and had been closely watching his movements with a view to averting the tragedy. The thought about the consequences of such a sacrifice in the temple had also prompted him to intervene. Having restrained Vasudeo Balvant from executing his resolve, he impressed upon the desperate patriot the irrationalism involved in the vow. Vasudeo Balvant knew a little of Telugu and was quite proficient in Kanarese. Mallappa told Vasudeo Balvant that they were living in *Kaliyuga*; the Dark Age. His obstinate vow was, therefore, incapable of propitiating God and so unwise. Mallappa also told Vasudeo Balvant that he could continue his prayers—*anusthan*—without feeling uneasy and promised to arrange for his meals and comforts during the period. But he said that the alternative of self-sacrifice would mean nothing short of suicide—a great sin. Mallappa earned a paltry salary of four rupees per month and his generosity, despite his humble income, moved the patriot. Mallappa's arguments gained weight on the arrival of a Telangi woman Viramma who was a daily visitor to the temple. Both of them invited the village Patil to the scene. The latter promised Vasudeo Balvant a place of seclusion and secrecy, for his prayers, and the fateful day passed off without the fatal tragedy.

The episode was an astounding repetition of history. A greater rebel of similar intense emotions had resolved in a similar manner and attempted similar self-sacrifice at the same place more than two hundred years previously in the same month of April! Shivaji had visited this very place in 1677, and attempted the same ordeal though in an entirely different mental condition. The human mind thinks of forsaking the body, when highly elated at the complete triumph of one's mission or filled with

<sup>9</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.



frustration at the utter failure in accomplishing one's goal in life. Vasudeo Balvant sought death on account of such frustration in life; Shivaji on account of the fulfilment of his mission of liberating his motherland and establishing an independent kingdom in India! Both attempted the self-sacrifice at the same place. The fact underlines the exhilarating set-up of Shree Shaila Mallikarjun, which lifted human minds with powerful sentiments into the rarefied atmosphere full of thoughts about the supernatural, beyond the worldly existence. Shivaji's attempt is thus described by a famous historian: "Shivaji ascended this difficult plateau, bathed in the Krishna and spent some ten days at Shri Shaila doing religious rites. The quiet and secluded beauty of the scenery and the spiritual atmosphere of the place penetrated his soul, and he believed that he would find no better spot to die in. So he attempted to cut off his own head before the goddess; but his ministers restrained his religious frenzy and recalled him to a sense of duty to his subjects and the Hindu world at large."<sup>10</sup> Shivaji then left the place ordering a ghat, a monastery and a *dharmashala* to be built at the place.

After moving to the safe resort arranged for by the village Patil Vasudeo Balvant speedily recouped his health. Once free from physical ailment under the kind treatment of his hosts, he reconsidered his resolve and gave it up for good. Critical moments once missed seldom grip the human mind again.

Within a few days, about the second week of May 1879, Vasudeo Balvant decided to go to Gangapur for further convalescence. Detectives and greedy persons enamoured of the reward announced for assistance in his arrest were on his watch. He, therefore, disguised himself as a *sannyasi* with a rosary of *Rudraksha* beads around his neck and the *Karnakundalas* in his ears. With this austere appearance he arrived at Kurnul around 20th May 1879 *en route* to Gangapur. Intending to revise his plans before he started his campaign again, he enjoyed meeting an astute and daring colleague, Bhaskar Jyotishi, at Kurnul. Bhaskar had nothing but the highest admiration for Vasudeo Balvant for his spirit of sacrifice in the country's cause. It was here that the important letter, afterwards found with another of Vasudeo Balvant's colleagues and described as "by no means as innocent as Vasudeo would wish it to appear" by a Government spokesman, was given by Bhaskar to Vasudeo Balvant. It introduced the latter to Moulavi Mohamed Saheb of Hyderabad, a very influential person in the Nizam's Dominions. It read:

<sup>10</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji And His Times*, p. 297.

"At present I am in the district of Kurnul and wish to go soon to Benares; here I met this man. When I was in Poona, he met me ten or twenty times. In these visits I came to know of his condition and circumstances in a great many ways. *I have not come across any man among lacs of people who is anxious to such an extent to have his country—Hindustan—in prosperity as this man is.* Out of 1,000 or 5,000 men he is brave, competent, and mortifies the flesh, and very few persons can be found who come up to him, in the ways of the observance of our Hindu religion. He knows the working of the Government offices, both in Marathi and English. You being a very influential man in Hyderabad and an appreciator of merit, he has an ardent desire to see you. *He has spent thousands of rupees of his own on the worldly affairs of the people. Knowing that by a visit to you some way ensuring prosperity may arise, he has come.*"

Continuous efforts to organise the campaign had by now tired out Vasudeo Balvant and physically exhausted him. And while engrossed with his further plans he exclaimed: "No rest in life."<sup>11</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant reached Gangapur in the first week of June 1879, and lived in the temple of Shree Datta as "Kashikar Bawa".

At Gangapur Vasudeo Balvant's friends arranged for his meals and looked after his comforts. Rango Moreshwar Mahajan and Krishnajipant Gogte, two of his closest acquaintances, served as clerks at the toll *naka* near Gangapur. Mahajan hailed from Anjarla in the Konkan, and had received his education at Thana and Poona. But he had no English education. His uncle stayed in Poona. Mahajan occasionally broke journey at Poona on his way to Konkan where he went to meet his uncle. While in Poona, he often met Vasudeo Balvant. During these visits he formed intimate contacts with Vasudeo Balvant. Both Mahajan and Gogte served "Kashikar Bawa" with great care and devotion.

The temple of Dattatraya was a few furlongs away from Mahajan's residence. When Vasudeo Balvant recouped his health and regained enough strength Mahajan prevailed upon him to move to his house at Gangapur. Vasudeo Balvant did accordingly. He played the role of "Kashikar Bawa" so well that even the mother of Mahajan did not know his identity until his arrest!

As the monsoon set in the river in front of the temple roared

<sup>11</sup> Diary of Vasudeo Balvant, May 17, 1879.

with floods, and nature wore its garment of velvet green at the sacred spot. In the midst of the prodigious charm of natural beauty Vasudeo Balvant's optimism once more buoyed up and charged his mind to duty again. During random talks Vasudeo Balvant narrated to Mahajan the thrilling exploits in his past life in which the latter evinced keen interest. The restless nature of Vasudeo Balvant asserted itself at Gangapur. He invited the youths of Gangapur to a meeting, and taking advantage of the liberal arms restrictions in the Nizam's territory, started classes for training the youths in the use of the gun and other weapons.

Vasudeo Balvant also contacted the warlike tribe of the Rohillas residing in the Rohilla quarters of the district of Paga through Rango Moreswar Mahajan. Paga was an independent *jahgir* of the Co-Regent *Sham-Sool-Umra* and a safe refuge of fugitives from the adjoining territory of the British or the Nizam. Mahajan had established intimate relations with the local Rohillas, and was best fitted as an intermediary in the negotiations carried on by Vasudeo Balvant with the Rohillas for securing men for his new army. He almost simultaneously contacted three Lingayat adventurers—*Satya bin Kuntayya* of Telur, *Mailgiri bin Sharnappa Wani*, and *Chatur alias Sanyasi bin Bomanna Koli* for the same purpose.

- Vasudeo Balvant summoned his erstwhile colleagues in different parts of India to rally round his banner. He sent Bhaskar Jyotishi to Benares on a secret mission. With the letter of introduction given by Bhaskar he sought reinforcements from Moulvi Mohomed Saheb of Hyderabad, who was the leader of the Arabs, Rohillas and Sikhs in the Nizam's service. The Moulvi was "a man of great influence and many friends, and one whom people seemed to fear speaking about" according to the subsequent information furnished by the British Resident at Hyderabad, Sir Richard Meade, to Bombay Government. Vasudeo Balvant also opened correspondence with the Rampa rebels in the Godavari District in the South and had approached all the native States in and beyond the Deccan. He had many friends in the army commanding bodies of armed men, and he had also consultations with them.

The letters intended for Vasudeo Balvant while he was underground used to be delivered in the name of Mahajan. His own letters to others were written in the hand of another person. All his moves were so cautiously made that no outsider knew anything about them. The British Resident afterwards tried to ascertain the real relations and transactions which had taken

place between Vasudeo Balvant and Moulvi Mohomed Saheb of Hyderabad, but "was unable to obtain any certain information—still less proof about their relations".

During this period, while in a gay mood Vasudeo Balvant would play cards and *ganjiphas* with Mahajan and others, and political discussions took place among them. He told them that he intended to raise a cavalry of two hundred men and an infantry of two hundred footmen and to engage a Patwari named Ramchandrapant Hanmanta Kulkarni of Ganoor, as accountant and keeper of the muster-roll on Rs. 100 a month.

The negotiations between Mahajan and the Rohillas and others went on satisfactorily. Mahajan met the Rohilla leader Ismailkhan at Annoor and disclosed to him his requirement. Ismailkhan enquired: "Who is going to employ the Rohillas?" Mahajan replied that it was his brother. Ismailkhan then asked for a meeting between him and the brother for direct talks in the matter.

Vasudeo Balvant started accordingly for Annoor the next day in the early morning to meet Ismailkhan and reached there at seven o'clock. He stayed at the *chavdi* outside the village. The Rohillas had made special arrangement for his meals and lodgings at the *chavdi* and knew him as "Maharaj". Ismailkhan, Shaikh Shahabuddin Shaikh Imam, Hasankhan Sherekhan, Shaikh Sondoo Shaikh Ahmed, Syed Husenkhan and Shaikh Husenkhan represented the Rohillas and Janojirao Yashwantrao voiced the views of the Deccani people at the conference with Vasudeo Balvant. Vasudeo Balvant had muffled his face with his upper-cloth to conceal it from the strangers, saying that it was a precaution against cold which he had recently caught. He hardly exposed any part of his face except a portion of the nose.

When Vasudeo Balvant offered the Rohillas a salary of Rs. 10 a month and free food, Ismailkhan exclaimed: "On such a handsome salary you would get as many men as you want!"

When the negotiations entered the final stage after prolonged parleying, Vasudeo Balvant left the *chavdi* and went to the Rohilla quarters. There, Mahajan wrote an agreement as per the dictation of Vasudeo Balvant and it was signed by Ismailkhan on behalf of the Rohillas. According to this agreement, the Rohilla chief was to supply five hundred Rohillas to Vasudeo Balvant. Without any mounts of his own, Vasudeo Balvant wished two hundred of them to be horsemen with horses, to which Ismailkhan agreed. Ismailkhan was to be promoted as

a Jamadar after the army was raised and to receive a monthly salary of Rupees twenty-five. When the agreement was signed Vasudeo Balvant said to Janojirao: "There is no objection to anyone of our Deccani people joining the army even hereafter if he so desires." Vasudeo Balvant also told Ismailkhan and others that the men would have to live in the hills under him and fight against the British Government.

During the negotiations Mahajan carried on with the Lingayats and Koli Naiks, Mailgiri *bin* Sharnappa agreed to supply two hundred armed men after enquiring about the purpose of the recruitment. Satya *bin* Kuntayya of Telur agreed to supply a hundred armed men and Chatur *alias* Sanyasi *bin* Bomanna Koli a hundred fighting men on the same terms.

Vasudeo Balvant returned to Gangapur after the successful negotiations. As the monsoon broke out in the meantime he decided to commission the recruits—nine hundred strong—at the end of the rainy season. Within a few days, however, he received a message from the Rohilla chief that he would supply the men as agreed upon, but only if an advance of two thousand rupees was made to him.

Vasudeo Balvant had not sufficient money with him for the advance. But he had portions of the booty kept at different places. Gopal Moreshwar had already gone to Poona to bring the money. But he could not procure the requisite amount. Mahajan offered to bring the remainder from another place. But Vasudeo Balvant did not approve of the proposal, decided to bring it from Pandharpur and himself started for that place in the company of Gopal Moreshwar.

The power and ability of the projected Rohilla column in the field of rebellion can be seen from the exploit of Ismailkhan's men even before Vasudeo Balvant returned to Annoor to commence the enlistment when they committed a daring dacoity at Bolaram in Hyderabad, and also from the savage attack which they threatened to make on the party of Abdul Hakk when he went to Annoor to arrest Ismailkhan.

The arrangement for the money would not have taken more than a fortnight to complete. Had not misfortune frowned upon Vasudeo Balvant in the meantime, his new little column of the robust reckless and defiant Rohillas and others would have gone into action against the British Government according to plan. Impressed by its initial success, hundreds of ignorant peasants and tribesmen would have joined its ranks, and a great revolt against the British would have broken out

in India. History tells us that many a rising which had an obscure origin eventually developed into decisive risings. But destiny willed otherwise in the case of Vasudeo Balvant. Treachery cast its ruinous spell over the revolutionary leader's movements, and his ambitious and gallant project was transformed into an unrealised dream.

## CHAPTER XV

### EXCITING PURSUIT AND ARREST

As conflicting rumours about Vasudeo Balvant spread in different parts of the country he was busy with his plans at Gangapur. Assessing their magnitude the *Times of India* said : "Vasudeo Balvant has endeavoured to extend the area of disturbances to Nasik and to the difficult country of Satpura hills in Ahmadnagar and Akola districts. That would indicate that part of his larger scheme of disturbances is in course of realisation. The raid on Palaspe near Panvell shows that he is capable of going far afield. . . . He is evidently a man capable of giving more trouble."

As European troops were scouring the Deccan in the sweltering heat of the summer the European world clamoured against the plight of their countrymen. Government, however, stuck to its plan of posting European troops in the affected area to root out the trouble.

In London, on 3rd June 1879, *The Times* came out with its longest editorial on the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant. Therein it referred to the anti-*saucar* riots in the Deccan, and advised the Government to revise its land assessment policy so that the current pre-eminently agrarian unrest would automatically die out. It said : "No precedent can be found for the active disaffection of the peasantry accompanied by deeds of violence, to which the peninsula of Hindustan has been a stranger since the dark days of 1857."

On 9th June 1879, the paper reported : "Wassudeo Bulwant Phadke, the organising spirit of the movement, is still at large."

Sympathisers of Vasudeo Balvant at Poona, about this time, posted letters to high Government officials, charging them with lamentable incompetence and extolling the invincibility of the insurgents. The letters said that even though the followers of Shivajee II appeared to be dormant they were not dead. When the monsoon ended they would renew their efforts with vigour.

The popular inclination to compare Vasudeo Balvant with Shivaji was not without justification. He had drawn inspiration from the life of Shivaji and although he substituted the ideal of *Indian Republic* in place of Shivaji's *Hindavi Swaraj* the

whole scheme of his revolt was modelled on the pattern adopted by Shivaji for his revolt against the Muslim rule.

The times chosen by Vasudeo Balvant for his revolt were also propitious. Affairs generally looked gloomy for England all over the world. Isnadulla had not yet been avenged. In Turkey it seemed that the treaty of Berlin would fail in averting the European war. In Egypt grave complications loomed ahead. In the East the King of Burma was about to try conclusions with the British Government and Yakub Khan also had not yet submitted. In India the Rampa rebellion was crippling the Government forces in the South. Under such circumstances the Government firmly resolved to capture Vasudeo Balvant at any cost before the monsoon.

As a result, the close relatives of Vasudeo Balvant were shadowed and harassed by the detectives for ascertaining his whereabouts. His aged father at Shirdhon was subjected to repeated house-searches and prolonged interrogation by the police. The residence of Vasudeo Balvant's wife at Junnar was also frequently visited by them in the hope that her husband would at least go to meet her, if not others. But Vasudeo Balvant never went to meet her, and the police were disappointed. The Government at last removed Bai from Junnar to Shirdhon under a strong police guard. Vasudeo Balvant's brother, Krishnaji Balvant, who was at Bombay, was also called to the police station at intervals.

Raids, searches, investigation and arrests continued with conspicuous notoriety in Poona. Even men of position did not escape the police suspicion. Hari Ganesh *alias* Annasaheb Patwardhan, ex-Dewan of Sangli, was passing his days of retirement in Poona. In the month of June 1879, the police searched his mansion for suppressed booty! But in vain. At the corner of the Bhikardas garden then lived Rambhau Natu. Suspecting that his son, Balvant, had correspondence with Vasudeo Balvant, the police raided his house. But nothing incriminating was found by them. The Government spokesmen proffered the advice to the people that they must bear the inconvenience with patience as the search for Vasudeo Balvant was an intricate affair and innocent people often had to suffer during critical times.

While the searches went on in Poona nobody knew for certain the whereabouts of Vasudeo Balvant. There were various rumours about him current among the people. Some of them said that Vasudeo Balvant had gone into exile and proceeded to Nepal, often the asylum of patriots in hiding. Benares was



a place of pilgrimage for Hindu *sannyasis* and the safe refuge of revolutionaries. Others, therefore, boldly asserted that Vasudeo Balvant had abandoned his role of an insurgent and gone on a pilgrimage to Benares on his way to Nepal in the disguise of a *sannyasi*. There was also a thick rumour in Bombay that he had paid a visit to the city for obtaining the blessings of a famous saint.

Close on eighteen hundred Indian and European troops were by now engaged in suppressing the revolt. But success never seemed in their sight for a long time. Chances of success, however, improved when certain information trickled into the hands of Major Daniell in July 1879, and he started for the South with a large force to capture the patriot.

It seemed to some that a letter from Vasudeo Balvant to one of his colleagues was intercepted by Government spies, and it furnished the required information to Major Daniell. Others described Daniell's departure for Hyderabad as a fluke visit which led him to success. The real sequence of events, however, presents a strange and shameful narrative. In a temple in the Budhwar Peth at Poona, were then being delivered religious discourses by a preacher to the customary audience of women. One of them said to another: "The Government is moving heaven and earth here for tracing out Vasudeo Balvant. He is, however, quite safe at Gangapur where I saw him a couple of days ago." A Police Jamadar's wife sitting beside her overheard the remarks and being fully aware of the big reward proclaimed for furnishing the information leading to the capture of Vasudeo Balvant, she conveyed the "valuable" information to her husband. The Jamadar was tempted by the prize-money. He failed to discriminate between ill-gotten wealth and patriotic poverty. He forgot the cause of his country, immediately contacted Major Daniell, and passed on the information to him.

The entire Government machinery now moved electrically. Major Daniell met Colonel Young, Controllor of Military Accounts at Poona, and requisitioned the services of a clerk by name Shaikh Suleman, who was the brother of the A.D.C. of the Governor of Bombay and a peon named Bhiwa to identify Vasudeo Balvant. According to Daniell's instructions they left Poona for Gudur on 11th July 1879, reaching Gangapur from there the next morning.

Suleman and Bhiwa kept an unobtrusive watch at the river bank at Gangapur, where Brahmins used to come in the evening to perform *sandhya* and Vasudeo Balvant, highly religious by temperament, was expected to appear in the evening. After a

few tedious moments Vasudeo Balvant advanced in their sight with leisurely steps. His ample beard and thick moustache baffled them at the outset. But in a few moments they recognised him and hurriedly left the bank.

The watchdogs of Major Daniell immediately went to Gudur, and telegraphically informed him of their success. They returned to Gangapur on 13th July and carried on further investigations. They wired back their conclusion to Major Daniell, and informed him that if a youth named Rangopant Moreshwar Mahajan was arrested without any delay their objective would be accomplished.

For when Suleman met Mahajan at Gangapur he tactfully extracted the necessary information from Mahajan. Mahajan was not, however, less crafty. He quickly realised the purpose of Suleman's queries. When Vasudeo Balvant returned home he told him all about Suleman's arrival at Gangapur and cautioned him against the possible Government plan to arrest him at Gangapur.

Daniell thought that if known acquaintances were observed around Vasudeo Balvant would turn suspicious and slip out of his hands. So he deputed a woman to continue the watch over Vasudeo Balvant till he himself reached Gangapur.

Major Daniell quickly decided on the further steps. He saw Sir Richard Temple, the Governor of Bombay, and convinced him that if they moved speedily their efforts would be crowned with success. Sir Richard was desperately anxious to arrest Vasudeo Balvant, and telegraphed an urgent advice in code words to Sir Richard Meade, the British Resident at Hyderabad. He intimated the British Resident about the impending arrival of Major Daniell in Hyderabad and the purpose of his visit, and requested him to render all assistance to Major Daniell in his mission. The message was dispatched by Sir Richard in code words to preclude the possibility of its being intercepted and divulged to Vasudeo Balvant by his many sympathisers.

Major Daniell left for Hyderabad on 16th July 1879, arriving there on 17th July 1879, in the evening. He drove straight to the British Residency and conferred with Sir Richard Meade. Meade communicated the purpose of Daniell's visit to the Nizam. The most faithful ally of the British Government, the Nizam readily entrusted the work of assisting Daniell to his Prime Minister Sir Salar Jang and the Police Commissioner of Hyderabad Sayed Abdul Hakk. Abdul Hakk worked fanatically. Daniell also received valuable assistance from the European Inspector of Police for Berar, Stephenson. The Inspector of Police for

Hyderabad, Sayed Noor, with Police Havaldars also started with Major Daniell for Gulbarga on 19th July 1879. The noose of capture began to tighten round the neck of Vasudeo Balvant.

On hearing Mahajan Vasudeo Balvant changed his track with a view to outwitting the enemy and swiftly moved towards Pandharpur.

When Daniell reached Gulbarga on 19th July, in the evening, he selected two Police Inspectors and four armed constables and divided his party into two, to forestall the runaway on both the public highways. Gangapur was twenty miles away from Gudur. Daniell himself with his party started for Gangapur via Gudur, and asked the other party led by Abdul Hakk to proceed straight from Gulbarga to Gangapur by another route to cover a distance of forty miles. Both the parties were to meet each other at Gangapur in the early morning, on 20th July 1879.

The Revenue Commissioner, the Inspector-General of Police, the Superintendent of Police and all the divisional officers of Hyderabad presented a guard of honour to Commissioner Abdul Hakk and his party at Gulbarga. The party consisting of a force of a hundred *swars* and two hundred constables led by eight Jamadars, eight Duffedars and a Superintendent then started for Gangapur.

Now began the exciting breath-catching pursuit of Vasudeo Balvant on the border of the Nizam's territory adjoining the Bijapur district. Daniell was racing against time disregarding personal comforts. He left Gulbarga on the evening of 19th July. Knowing full well that Vasudeo Balvant was closely acquainted with the region and commanded unbounded sympathy of the local inhabitants, he did not waste time even in taking his meals. The rain had poured out heavy showers rendering his track muddy and marshy. He, therefore, carried only a light kit, barely necessary clothes and food enough only for four days. It consisted of a couple of tins of biscuits, some cheese and plenty of whisky. He travelled the whole night to arrive at Gangapur on the morning of 20th July without any rest or even a short sleep. The *Daily Telegraph* of London thus described his swift and determined march: "Swift as the storm, terrible as fate, relentless as death, the representative of the British authority held to the track."

Abdul Hakk and his party reached Gangapur ahead of Daniell. Their sight filled the people with fear and anxiety. Abdul Hakk cordoned off the temple at Gangapur and arrested all its inmates. The arrested persons included Mahajan, who was half-dead with fright, and Abdul Hakk gathered the required information from

him without much effort. Entrusting the charge of Mahajan and others to a select armed guard, Abdul Hakk proceeded with the rest of the party to the Rohilla stronghold at Annoor. He took Ismailkhan and others by surprise and succeeded in disarming and arresting them. All the arrested persons were then brought to Gangapur.

The news of the arrest of the Rohilla leaders spread like wild fire in the surrounding villages. Angry Rohilla inhabitants of the villages, fully armed, swarmed into Gangapur in large numbers during the night to attack Abdul Hakk's party, and forcibly set their leaders free. Abdul Hakk and his men would have been exterminated in the determined attack of the villagers. But just then the *Naib* of the Co-regent *Sham-sool-Umra* came to his rescue, and somehow succeeded by his eloquence in pacifying the angry mob.

Abdul Hakk learnt that Vasudeo Balvant had left for Pandharpur via Enamalli three days previously, and could be traced out on proper enquiries at Sangam. He, therefore, left for Sangam, leaving his captives in the hands of his officers.

Major Daniell on his way plodded along the road with clods of wet earth stuck to his soiled boots and the sweat damping his massive body. The cramped monsoon quarters beat down his vigour; but on he went, whistling like a sportive European. It was really an excruciating experience for him. On reaching Gangapur, Daniell, however, proceeded to Sangam without taking any rest.

Sayed Abdul Hakk overtook Daniell two miles away from Gangapur, gave him his own horse and himself mounted the horse of one of his *swars*. They then returned to Gangapur. Major Daniell interrogated the arrested persons, eliciting from them all the further information wanted by him and Abdul Hakk, and both of them then commenced the further pursuit of Vasudeo Balvant.

Vasudeo Balvant had been having temperature, and he was now obliged to face the most hazardous crisis of his life. He had just finished the trek from Gangapur to Sangam. The Bhima was in monsoon spate and rolled down towards Raichur to join the river Krishna in heavy confluence. There was no convenient place for Vasudeo Balvant to ford it safely. But Vasudeo Balvant decided to cross the Bhima in order to trick his pursuers.

On the bank of the Bhima he, therefore, took leave of all the followers accompanying him except one—Gopal Moreshwar. He packed important documents and defensive arms in a handy

bedding and with the solitary companion turned to the river on his onward journey.

Unable to catch the sight of any boatman he passed some moments in great anxiety. The decision, however, was to be taken immediately, and he resolved to swim across the Bhima in the last resort in case no boat was available to them for crossing the river. For he himself was an expert swimmer since his days at Poona.

But just then, the white-bearded short-statured old boatman of Sangam, named Meerasaheb, appeared on the scene. Vasudeo Balvant's joy knew no bounds when he saw Meerasaheb. He asked Meera to carry him and his companion to the other bank. Meera grinned. For the heavy flood was his great difficulty. Vasudeo Balvant endeavoured to persuade Meera to lend them a lift over the river. But Meera still hesitated. Vasudeo Balvant, thereupon, told him in a firm tone that if he would not help them in crossing the river they were determined to jump into the river and swim across, whatever the consequences.

This desperate resolve of Vasudeo Balvant alarmed the old man. He untied his country boat lying on the bank, and the two revolutionaries stepped into it amidst the storm and heavy downpour of rain.

On reaching the other bank, Vasudeo Balvant rewarded the boatman and whispered something into his ears. Meera did accordingly before Daniell reached Sangam.

Vasudeo Balvant crossed the Bhima on 17th July. Major Daniell reached Sangam on 20th July. He immediately arrested Meera and one Raoji, his helper, and collected from them the necessary information about the fugitives. Meera said to him: "Maharaj crossed the river in the solitary boat lying on this bank!"

Daniell felt chagrined when he knew that Vasudeo Balvant had deprived him of the only available conveyance. But he did not lose heart.

He rallied the fishermen of Sangam to his aid, and procured a score of dry empty gourd shells which the fishermen use for floats to buoy their nets. He tied them to the shoulders of eight choice soldiers including Stephenson, Abdul Hakk and himself and also equipped eight horses with the swimming contrivances. And with these rude life-belts, he plunged into the foaming Bhima. The company rocked like tiny ships in an angry ocean. With momentary dips in the water, beaten by floods, the party reached the other bank at about three o'clock in the afternoon, on 20th July. There they let loose their horses for rest, dried

their clothes, cleaned and oiled the weapons, massaged the horses and renewed their hunt without further delay.

Vasudeo Balvant and Gopal Moreshwar had crossed much distance in the meantime. They spent the whole day of 18th July, in the inner room of a dilapidated house in the deserted village of Shindgi near the river Bhima and went to Ukalgi. They passed on to Huloor and from there to Bagloor. The local Kulkarni received them at Bagloor and arranged for their meals. They rested for the day in a temple at Bagloor.

They next halted at Narayanpur. After taking their dinner at Narayanpur Vasudeo Balvant and his companion reached the village of Shirasgi on the afternoon of 19th July and stayed there for the night. They had a brief talk with the village officials. They left Shirasgi in the afternoon the next day. Passing by the village of Ghimbi Khurd, they reached Devar Navadgi at sunset, on 20th July.

<sup>1</sup> Once on the other side of the Bhima, Major Daniell drove his horses at top speed and approached the said house at Shindgi. He then continued his unremitting chase on 20th July in each of the villages in succession. At Shirasgi two little boys playing in the fields confirmed that two men answering to a particular description had gone through Shirasgi. Daniell proceeded further, obtaining fresh and recent traces of Vasudeo Balvant and his companion having passed through the village they visited. Drawing reins only to ensure the correctness of his track, Daniell crossed the Nizam's territory and entered British India at midnight, on 20th July, when he left the hamlet of Ghimbi Khurd.

The village of Devar Navadgi is situated six miles inside the Bijapur district from the border of the Nizam's territory. Vasudeo Balvant entered it on the fateful night of 20th July 1879, after a march of thirty long miles for four complete days. He was fatigued beyond description. He would leave a village and Daniell would enter it within a few hours. Such pursuit was going on for many hours past.

There were two places for wayfarers to sleep in at Devar Navadgi. One of them was a spacious Buddhist *vihara* on the outskirts of the village. It was carved out of solid hill rock with heavy pylons supporting the stony ceiling.

It was 10 p.m. when Vasudeo Balvant entered the *vihara* which was lit up intermittently by the flashes of lightning illuminating the monsoon skies.

He had fasted the whole day and was running high temperature. His favourite sword with its ruby-studded scabbard,

suspended from his waist, along with a loaded revolver and a tiny double-edged weapon with a handle of buck-horn. He had his important documents and a small purse tied up in his bedding. Using the bedding as a pillow and accompanied by his only comrade, Gopal Moreshwar, Vasudeo Balvant delivered his body to the much-needed sleep in the Buddhist *vihar* at Devar Navadgi.

Vasudeo Balvant was wearing a *surwar* and had wrapped his white turban over his grown-up hair, tightening its flaps over his ears. As he slept among the many travellers in the *vihar* he afforded a meagre glimpse of his face, and looked more like a Muslim or a North Indian *musafir* than his real self.

Major Daniell reached Devar Navadgi within four hours after leaving Narayanpur. He had also now travelled continuously for forty-two hours. Quite sure that Vasudeo Balvant would rest for the night at Devar Navadgi, he questioned the villagers at the *chavdi* outside, and learnt that two men had gone in the direction of the *vihar* a few hours before.

Dismounting their horses at the *chavdi* and entrusting them to the care of his men to avoid their preys being alerted by the tread of the horses, Daniell and the other officers proceeded to the Buddhist *vihar* on foot.

The rain splashed furiously in the layout garden around the *vihar* and cries of wild jackals sounded the evil portent for Vasudeo Balvant that night.

Nothing was clearly visible except the dark opening of the *vihar* in the overhanging rock. Bidding all but one of his attendants to crouch down in silence, Daniell threw the faint light of his muffled lamp into the sanctuary on the endless crowd of travellers. The figures—a tall and a short one—under the archway wrapped from head to foot, in their sheets attracted his immediate attention. Daniell had no doubt that the tall figure was that of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke.

Gloating with considerable exultation Daniell tackled the situation with caution. He could guess with what preparation of self-defence his adversary, who had been the terror of the British Government for many months, must have fortified himself and asked Stephenson and Abdul Hakk to be careful and prepared to strike.

When Major Daniell focussed the dim light of his lantern in the *vihar* Vasudeo Balvant was fast asleep. After unmistakable identity, without encountering the slightest opposition, Daniell placed his right hand on his service revolver and with his legs on either side of the tall sleeping figure, moved his right foot

on the sword of Vasudeo Balvant. He then pounced upon Vasudeo Balvant. Catching him at the throat by the left hand, he sat on his broad chest and thundered at him in a triumphant voice: "Vasudeo Balvantji! Had I not sworn I would catch you? I have got you now. Surrender to me!"

At the same time, Abdul Hakk sprang upon Gopal Moreshwar and tried to strangle him. Gopal Moreshwar was more alert. As soon as his assailant's hand gripped his throat, he caught the assailant's fingers between his teeth and bit them. He also immediately drew out his sword half-rising for the fight with a view to striking his opponent. But Major Daniell stretched himself from over the body of his charge, and dealt a swashing blow on the face of Gopal Moreshwar who reeled back under the hit and collapsed to the ground. Abdul Hakk overpowered and arrested him.

Feeling a heavy pressure on his chest, Vasudeo Balvant woke up from his deep slumber. The scene in front in the faintly lighted recess at first appeared to him like a dream. But he soon grasped the dangerous reality. Looking up to Major Daniell, he felt his revolver. It was, however, thrown away by the Major. He tried to wrench his sword. But it was suppressed by the Major under the heel of his boot. Vasudeo Balvant was completely frustrated in his attempt to fight.

Yet he did not utter a word of surrender. When Daniell arrogantly ordered him to surrender, Vasudeo Balvant replied in a defiant tone: "It does not redound to your credit that you should have captured me stealthily, all alone, while I was asleep. You would have done better if you had arrested me when I was wide awake after allowing me to fight. Should you have eventually captured me, you would have won fame in the world of brave men. If you still dare set me free, do so! We shall fight a duel and he who wins would be the victor!"

This challenge in clear ringing voice and excellent English accents stunned Major Daniell. For with all his resentment against Vasudeo Balvant, he was at last filled with admiration for the Indian rebel. Daniell smiled at the brave challenge; but refused to accept it and made no reply.

Indignant at the loss of an opportunity to vanquish the enemy in an open fight, Vasudeo Balvant cursed Daniell and immediately wrestled with fate to free himself from his clutches. In the scuffle that ensued, Daniell attempted to strengthen his hold over Vasudeo Balvant, and the latter sustained injuries to his arms and chest. He was eventually overpowered by Daniell although after a fierce resistance.



Daniell also whistled to his men lying in wait. They rushed into the *vihar*. Overwhelmed by sheer numbers, Vasudeo Balvant and Gopal Moreshwar were handcuffed, bound in chains and marched off to the *chavdi* outside Devar Navadgi.

There, a minute search was made of Vasudeo Balvant's person. In the search were found a sword and a double-edged weapon called "mada". In his bedding were found his diary and autobiography, two round-bottomed brass *lotas*, the rosary of *Rudraksha* beads, a picture of Shree Datta, the manuscript of a treatise on war, copies of Government proclamation announcing a reward for his arrest, a personal letter to the Governor of Bombay which he was drafting, a Bombay army-map, a summary of rules for his conduct and deportment while fighting and the manuscript of "the tenets for the conduct of the new ruler coming to power after a political revolution".

The prisoners were then sent to the railway station at Dudhni via Afzulpur, under a heavy escort of hundred armed men under the personal supervision of Stephenson. This was done by Daniell to avoid the river Bhima lying on the alternative route, as Daniell was not sure whether the prisoners would not attempt to escape by jumping into the river.

Daniell informed Sir Richard Temple of his coup by telegram from Gangapur, examined the arrested persons of the besieged town and after attending to urgent correspondence took his meals in the camp after forty-two hours. He ordered the arrested persons to be sent to Gulbarga and detained in the jail there. He himself left for Poona at 9 a.m. on 22nd July 1879.

On the way to Dudhni, the sight of Vasudeo Balvant in chains provoked the people. They booed the guards and refused to offer them food all along the route. Stephenson and his men had, therefore, to go without food till eleven o'clock in the forenoon until they reached the station. And then alone could they partake of food and refreshments.

## CHAPTER XVI

### CONSPIRACY TO WAGE WAR

THE news of the arrest of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, on 20th July 1879, reached Poona at night the next day, and the people of Poona were roused from their beds, on 22nd July, by the exciting shouts of newsboys: "Vasudeo Balvant Phadke arrested!" The *Deccan Herald* brought out a special issue in the morning to announce the news.

As the special issue began to sell at fancy price in the streets of Poona, excitement in the city mounted by leaps and bounds. People were seen discussing the news at street corners, indicating their disinclination to accept it as authentic and dubbing it a canard. Many of them swore that Vasudeo Balvant would prefer to die rather than fall alive into the hands of the British Government! When the Indian servants communicated the news to their European masters the latter heaved a sigh of relief. They, however, felt disappointed when further informed by the servants that people were not inclined to believe the news.

The news, however, was true and as the day advanced everybody became reconciled to the sad reality. The Poona correspondents of the English dailies of Bombay then dispatched urgent telegrams to their papers to that effect at eleven o'clock at night, and they were prominently published in the columns of the papers usually monopolised by the news of the revolt. They ran like this:

#### Arrest of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke

Poona, July 22  
11-35 P.M.

"Our Poona correspondent telegraphs that the 'notorious' Wassudew Bulwunt Phadke was arrested by Major Daniell in the Kolladgi District between Belgaum and Kolhapur.

"Wassudew was in the course of flight and was traced from village to village, and finally caught with one companion in a temple. . . . Wassudew had enlisted five hundred Arabs and Rohillas and advanced their Jamadar Rs. 2000, promising Rs. 3000 more to purchase horses. Papers found with him contain a proposed plan of operation and rules for his conduct and

deportment while fighting. The news of his capture has created great excitement in Poona."

The papers carried more details about the arrest the next day. They also applauded the efforts of Major Daniell in effecting the arrest, and hoped that the complicity of the Poona leaders in the rebellion would soon come to light.

The arrest had a countrywide interest. And so the following message was released from the mountainous heights of Simla all over India, on 23rd July 1879 :

"Simla, July 23—Wasudewpant Phadke has been captured by Major Daniell at Hyderabad, with the assistance of a special officer deputed by the Nizam's Government."

The Reuters broadcast the news to the whole world from Bombay, on 24th July. *The Times* published it in London in its issue dated 25th July and it ran as follows :

('Through Reuters' Agency)  
India

Bombay, July 24

"Wassudew Balwunt Phadke, formerly a clerk in the Military Finance Office at Poona and lately notorious as the leader of the gang of dacoits, who committed acts of incendiarism and robbery in the Deccan, has been apprehended by the police who had long been in pursuit of him."

Information about the arrival of Vasudeo Balvant in Poona on 22nd July, spread in the city through the fancy of gossipers. Accordingly, on the evening of 22nd July thousands of people gathered at the railway station to see him. Police arrangement at the station proved inadequate. The people scaled the iron gates of the station and even tried to gatecrash to the station platform. But they were driven back by the police. They then raced up to the railway bridge. The Government did not relish the demonstration of public sympathy for Vasudeo Balvant ; but was helpless. The crowd at last squatted outside the station till nightfall and dispersed in disappointment as Vasudeo Balvant did not arrive in Poona that evening.

And, thereafter, the people lost the opportunity to see him arrive in Poona. For on 23rd July he arrived in Poona by train at 4-15 a.m. in the early morning. Some enterprising people had, however, screwed out the news of his arrival from the quarters concerned, and a small crowd did turn up at the station even at that odd hour. Growing wiser by the previous day's experience, the authorities had now tightened up precautionary measures.

A police party led by Subedar-Major Kadarkhan waited for the train at the station platform. Mr. Keyser, the First Assistant Collector and Magistrate of Poona, was personally present on the occasion. Representatives of the press had also gone to the station.

The police and military with fixed bayonets and drawn swords formed a semi-circular ring on the platform as the train slowly steamed in. In the bustle and confusion caused by its arrival the door of a special third-class compartment opened, and after six months of eventful career as a revolutionary leader, Vasudeo Balvant alighted from the train along with Gopal Moreshwar. He was heavily guarded on all sides by Indian and European troops immediately followed by Major Daniell, Stephenson and other officers.

Vasudeo Balvant in his manacles looked considerably sunburnt and grave. The local officers received the prisoners, and removed them in a closed carriage to Major Daniell's bungalow near the station. There, Mr. Keyser, as First Class Magistrate, issued a warrant to the jailor of the district jail in the city to receive Vasudeo Balvant. Gopal Moreshwar was separated from his leader and sent to the Cantonment lock-up in charge of Smith, the Chief Constable of the Poona Police. On their way to the respective places the prisoners were guarded by mounted *swars* of the Poona Horse. The Government had to post such a formidable guard for a political prisoner for the first time in Poona.

Vasudeo Balvant had not volunteered any statement or comment throughout his journey to Poona and parried the queries of Major Daniell with mute disregard. But in the Poona jail the torture-machine of the power that he had challenged, driven by a sense of savage revenge, started levelling him. He stoutly refused to divulge adverse evidence despite the persecution. But the torture reached its climax within twenty-four hours. With increased mental agitation his fever also mounted, and he perceived only one way of vindicating his self-respect and escaping further harassment. Suicide! On 24th July, at night, he tried to hang himself by a noose from the ceiling of his cell. The vigilance of the guard, however, foiled the attempt.

In spite of the strict secrecy maintained by the Government about the prisoner this news leaked out, got twisted in the process, and gave out that Vasudeo Balvant had committed suicide in the jail. The city of Poona hummed from end to end with the staggering news, and the people turned in hundreds to the district jail to verify it, the next day.

The jail authorities adopted immediate precautionary measures to avoid repetition of the attempt. They prohibited conversation by anybody with Vasudeo Balvant, and transferred him to a special cell in the European barracks under a strong guard of warders and jailor's peons. On receipt of the news of the attempted suicide, the higher authorities sent mounted European troops of the 78th Highlanders to his cell before evening. Two guards continued a round-the-clock close watch on the prisoner. Without the special permit from Major Daniell or Collector Moore nobody could meet Vasudeo Balvant any longer. A blazing incandescent lamp shone on a bracket outside, spotlighting the prisoner's movements inside, to enable the guards to easily watch them. Vasudeo Balvant passed the night of 25th July in this lighted cell.

On 25th July, the authorities also adopted special measures to prevent the prisoner's death through poisoned food. Vasudeo Balvant's food was cooked by a special cook under the personal supervision of the Parsi jailor, Framji Cawasji, who first made the cook taste it and then signed the permit for the prisoner's meals. The meals were then served to Vasudeo Balvant.

Meanwhile violent comments on the revolt appeared in the press. The *Times of India* was surprised that the plans for the rising attained such a magnificent success while the *Bombay Gazette* expressed great satisfaction that the impending disaster was averted by the timely arrest of Vasudeo Balvant. The arrogance of the *Civil and Military Gazette* transcended all bounds of decency. Its editor suggested hanging or flogging Vasudeo Balvant in the open. The *Madras Mail* described the future plans of Vasudeo Balvant as a savage conspiracy, and focussed Government's attention on the public sympathy displayed for him at Poona.

When continued torture for a week elicited nothing of consequence from Vasudeo Balvant Daniell was obliged to abandon the attempt, and in consultation with the Governor of Bombay left for Hyderabad to collect further evidence.

The Government felt the necessity of a photograph of Vasudeo Balvant in his new appearance to facilitate his identification at various places and also for record. The Government, therefore, called photographer King, who owned a photographic studio near the Government Bakery at Poona, to the Poona jail and he photographed Vasudeo Balvant in the jail on 28th July.

During the next fifteen days the news about Vasudeo Balvant became the topic of absorbing interest for all. Public imagination also gave out that the wife of Vasudeo Balvant was taken

to the jail to identify him. But she could not say that he was her husband. Even the Europeans were eager to see Vasudeo Balvant in jail and speak a word or two with him. He had attained fame by the name of Vasudeo Balvant. But the Europeans thought that both were his own names, and freely called him Bulwunt Wassudeo or even merely Bulwunt when they met him.

On one such occasion a European officer (probably Collector Moore) went to see Vasudeo Balvant in the jail and greeted him: "Good Morning, Bulwunt. How are you?" Vasudeo Balvant replied: "Oh, very well. How are you?"

The Officer: "Quite well. I thank you!"

Vasudeo Balvant: "I wish you issue orders that I should be treated better than any of the other prisoners here."

Officer: "Oh, yes. Hem! decidedly."

Viceroy Lord Lytton was closely watching the developments in the Deccan and commented on the rising while speaking on the "Deccan Ryots Bill" in the Imperial Legislative Council. He said: "Many persons will be disposed to attribute the success of these disturbances to the still unremedied conditions of the indebted ryots. There is no evidence in support of it and there is much evidence which points to a very different cause of these troubles."

A number of searches and arrests now followed. In the first week of August some alleged conspirators were arrested at Hyderabad (Deccan). On 5th August 1879 the Bombay police arrested Krishnaji Balvant Phadke, younger brother of Vasudeo Balvant, and sent him to Poona. When he detrained in handcuffs at the railway station at Poona he immediately attracted the people's attention. A collaborator of Vasudeo Balvant called Phansalkar was arrested at Sholapur, and another by name Lele was taken into police custody at Kalyan. Both of them resided at the Khasgiwale wada in Poona. The police seized some papers from their houses. Phansalkar's clerk was also arrested at Dhulia two days later.

Simultaneous with these searches and arrests the movements of revolutionaries participating in the upheaval also began in right earnest. For when the sands were fast running out every moment began to count. Many such patriots, who passed their days without disclosing their part in the rising in constant fear of being brought to book, were now on the run. The ordeals which these patriots, some in confinement, others in concealment, had to pass through, are narrated in a later chapter.

The Lingayat adventurers had been examined by Major

Daniell on 30th July and 1st August, when two of them had said that when asked by Vasudeo Balvant to supply the armed men to him, they had expressed their inability to do so.

Public curiosity centred on the historical trial of Vasudeo Balvant by the end of August. People thought that the trial would continue for a full special Session and would commence in the first week of September 1879. The Government was stated to have specially engaged a leading luminary of the Bombay Bar, Mr. Marriott, to conduct the prosecution.

The First Class City Magistrate of Poona, Mr. Alfred Keyser, recorded the first statement of Vasudeo Balvant on 22nd and 23rd August in the jail and another on 25th and 27th August. The trial of Vasudeo Balvant was the first sedition trial in India, and because of their love for Vasudeo Balvant, many witnesses were reluctant to depose against him. The Government had, therefore, to spend much time in strengthening the case against him.

People, however, attributed the reason for delay to quite a different reason. It was a common supposition that Vasudeo Balvant would never fall alive into the hands of the Government. Many people, therefore, said that the arrested person was not Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, but one Vasudeo Balvant Kale from Ratnagiri and that the latter's brother had identified the prisoner as his brother when he saw the photograph of the prisoner. They further said that the Collector of Poona also had been perplexed by Kale's assertion to that effect and had permitted him to see the prisoner and get himself convinced about the truth.

The rumour was false. But it attracted increased attention within a few days when proclamations purporting to have emanated from the Government and announcing a reward for the arrest of Vasudeo Balvant appeared on the walls of Satara, Poona and Hyderabad. Busybodies then posed the question: "If the Government has in fact captured Vasudeo Balvant why these fresh proclamations of reward for his arrest now?"

Vasudeo Balvant himself was restless after being in police custody for over two months, and addressed a petition to the Collector of Poona, demanding an immediate trial. He received a reply stating that the whole matter rested with the police, and that the Collector could do nothing in the matter. Vasudeo Balvant thereupon approached the higher authorities. But the evidence was by the time already before the Legal Remembrancer and Vasudeo Balvant was informed accordingly. He was further assured that the decision of the Government would be communicated to him quite soon.

As a matter of fact the Government had not allowed the investigations to drift. Sir Richard Temple personally looked into the matter and directed Major Westmacott and other officers on 25th July to move down to Pandharpur to assist Major Daniell there in following up the ramifications of the proceedings of Vasudeo Balvant. For it was from Pandharpur that Vasudeo Balvant was going to fetch the money required for recruiting the Rohillas. Daniell and others hardly took a month to complete the investigations and Nugents, Acting Secretary to Government, Judicial Department, submitted all the evidence collected by Major Daniell to J. R. Naylor, Remembrancer of Legal Affairs at Poona on 27th August 1879. Sir Richard was anxious to secure capital punishment for Vasudeo Balvant and so Nugents asked the Legal Remembrancer to report "on what charges Wassudeo Bulwunt Phadke should be brought to trial, whether in the event of his being tried for an offence against the State there is sufficient evidence to ensure conviction, and whether it is probable that a capital sentence will be passed if a conviction is secured." <sup>1</sup>

Before the Legal Remembrancer submitted his opinion to the Government, the publication in the press, on 1st September, of a report about Vasudeo Balvant's activities in exile touched off a storm, and there was quite a flutter in the dovecotes of the Governor's Executive Council over the publication. A prominent member of the Council, Ashburner, suggested an enquiry into the source from which the paper got the news. Accordingly Daniell had to offer a lengthy explanation in which he denied having sent any information to the press but disclosed that a gentleman had said to have had it from Abdul Hakk. Daniell also said that he believed that the account which was so detailed in nature must have been definitely inspired, if not sent, by Abdul Hakk. The Governor accepted the explanation, and directed that Abdul Hakk should, thereafter, know as little as possible about the case. The explanation, which the author had an opportunity to see in the original, shows the discipline existing in the British administration even in those early days.

It was not, however, till 28th September 1879, that the Legal Remembrancer, Naylor, was able to submit his opinion. While so doing he prepared from the evidence a detailed account of the activities of Vasudeo Balvant from February to July 1879, "which will be useful both to Government in determining upon

<sup>1</sup> Letter No. 5783 of 1879 (Confidential), J.D. Vol. 58-59 of 1879-80, Government of Bombay.



what charges Wasudeo should be prosecuted and to the officers whose duty it will be to conduct the prosecution."<sup>2</sup>

After asserting that the first clear charge "that could be established with utmost certainty" against Vasudeo Balvant was that of "belonging to a gang of persons habitually committing dacoities" under Section 400 of the Indian Penal Code and "of dacoities at some places" under Section 395 of the Code, the former of which would bring transportation for life for the accused, Naylor proceeded to say: "... Whatever may have been the object which the Ramoshis and others engaged with Wasudeo set before themselves in the various dacoities in which they were concerned, the dacoities were with Wasudeo the means towards an end and not an end in itself. The fact of his being a Brahmin and a man of some education and social position is alone sufficient to show that he did not associate with the Ramoshis for the mere purpose of loot. . . . The true object of all his strivings, the one idea which he entertained throughout, is no doubt correctly stated in both his diary and his autobiography. His endeavour was to raise a rebellion and to '*destroy the English!*'"

Naylor disappointed the Government by stating that "although there was the full intention at any rate on the part of Wasudeo to wage war against the Queen," no actual attempt to wage war was made, and so no offence punishable with death under Section 121 of the Indian Penal Code was committed. Naylor said that there was, however, abundant evidence to establish the offences against the State, under Sections 121A, 122 and 124A of the Code, of "conspiring to wage war," "collecting men, arms or ammunition or otherwise preparing to wage war" and sedition respectively and opined: "I do not entertain any doubt as to his being convicted under" one of the sections and "he ought, I think, be convicted under all these sections. The result of either conviction will be transportation for life."

"I am aware," Naylor added, "that there are political considerations which have to be weighed in arriving at a decision on a matter of this kind; but as far as I can judge from the information before me a conviction is certain. It will do no harm, but on the contrary much good to let the public see what a miserable failure Wasudeo's attempt to raise the country against our Government has been."

Within twenty-four hours another member of the Governor's Executive Council, Ravenscraft, submitted the case to the

<sup>2</sup> Confidential Communication, No. 1140 of 1879, J.D. Vol. 58-59 of 1879-80, Government of Bombay.

Governor. Ravenscraft supported the viewpoint of the Legal Remembrancer and added that he did not think that the charge under Section 121 of the Indian Penal Code should be instituted as "the failure of a political prosecution is always mischievous."

The Governor under the initials RT gave his decision and said: "I concur with Mr. Ravenscraft whose opinion approves that of the Legal Remembrancer. Prosecute him on both sets of charges as proposed."

Although the Governor pronounced the final decision in the matter there was clearly difference of opinion among his Councillors over the question of prosecuting Vasudeo Balvant on political charges. The trial of a patriot is always a matter of pride to his nation and it always reveals his greatness as the spokesman of his nation to the whole world. This truth was correctly realised by the dissentient Councillor, Ashburner, whose opinion at once shows the desperation to which Vasudeo Balvant had driven the rulers by his revolt and also the prominence which, in their opinion, his revolt and trial had attained in the estimation of the world. Ashburner said: "Our object is to get rid of this mischievous man by transportation for life. If we try him on the political charges we shall give him an importance which he would not otherwise have received in the event of conviction. He would be elevated *to the position of a martyr* and secure the sympathy of all the disaffected characters in the Deccan.

"I would, therefore, in the first instance, try him on a charge of dacoity and not on the political charges in evidence. If he is transported *for life* it will be unnecessary to take any further measures. But if a more lenient sentence is passed we may bring forward the more serious charges.

"I fear, if we try him on a political charge then *Phadke will take the opportunity of making an international trial of it and sowing the seeds of more disaffection.*"

How correct was the said appraisal of Vasudeo Balvant's place in his country's history! Of course nobody would agree that even if he were to be tried as a so-called dacoit he would not have gone down in history as a fighter for his country's freedom.

The Governor's opinion, however, prevailed and the Governor-in-Council resolved, on 6th October 1879, to accord sanction to the prosecution of Vasudeo Balvant for offences against the State as required by law, and directed that "Vasudeo Bulwunt Phadke should now be brought to trial without the least possible delay."

It also thanked the Legal Remembrancer for his valuable report."<sup>3</sup>

Nugents, as Acting Secretary to Government, sent the above resolution to the Legal Remembrancer, asking him "to take requisite measures for the proper conduct of the prosecution in this important case". The Legal Remembrancer directed Mr. Nanabhai Haridas, Government Pleader of the Bombay High Court, to conduct the prosecution. The underlying motive of the Government in selecting an Indian counsel for the purpose is evident from the following note of Ravencraft. He said: "All right. . . . I think, too, that it will be better for a pleader" (meaning an Indian, in those times) "to appear for the Crown than for an European officer. I mean, it will not look as if Government are over-anxious about the case or were afraid to entrust it to any but a Sahib." The note throws a flood of light on the Government's awareness of the political importance of the trial to the nation and the State and their anxiety to leave no stone unturned to secure the conviction of Vasudeo Balvant, while making a show that they did not fear anything going wrong if no extraordinary precaution was taken at every step.

The Government Resolution formally sanctioning the prosecution of Vasudeo Balvant for offences against the State was transmitted to Poona from "Bombay Castle", on 18th October 1879. Separate sanction for prosecuting Vasudeo Balvant for the raids in Bhore State was also accorded by the Acting Political Agent for the State from Satara.

The City of Poona had suffered a lot because of the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant. Who then could dare incur further displeasure of the Government on himself by coming forward to defend Vasudeo Balvant in the law court? That Vasudeo Balvant himself did not propose to give any counsel is clear from the fact that nobody appeared for him in the court on the first day of the hearing of his case before the Magistrate.

But it would have constituted a blot on the fair name of Poona if a patriot like Vasudeo Balvant were to go undefended on the above account. Poona had not lost its love for Vasudeo Balvant, and patriotism was not as yet dead in the land. The imposing personality of Ranade with his flair for moving behind the curtain for a good cause still lived in Poona. The question about the defence of Vasudeo Balvant began to be discussed in his close circle. The deliberations went on until the last day. Denial of defence to Vasudeo Balvant would have been a sin both

<sup>3</sup> Government Resolution No. 6006 of 1879, Government of Bombay.

against justice and Indian patriotism, thought Ranade. Duty to his friend also prompted him to arrange for the defence of Vasudeo Balvant.

With this noble consideration Ranade's brave colleagues courageously went ahead in the matter. The dauntless lawyer in Sarvajani Kaka decided to shoulder the responsibility of the defence of Vasudeo Balvant when almost all the people feared the Government and no one was prepared to do the job. When Kaka's considerate friends asked him : " Do you realise what will be the consequences of your venture ? " Kaka solemnly replied : " What consequences do you mean ? At the most, the Government will be enraged. But if enraged it will hang Ganesh Vasudeo (Kaka's name) along with Vasudeo Balvant. What else can it do ? " <sup>4</sup> Kaka was prepared even for this eventuality, and with such fearless heart undertook to defend Vasudeo Balvant in the law court !

The preliminary hearing of the case commenced at Poona on 22nd October 1879. The Budhwar Wada having been burnt down in previous May, the Magistrate's Court was shifted to the Collector's office. It was crowded to capacity with hundreds of spectators, since morning. Its surrounding squares and verandas also were full of spectators. The Court premises were strongly guarded by the police and the European troops under the direct supervision of Assistant Collector Campbell.

The Government pleader of Bombay Mr. Nanabhai Haridas appeared for the prosecution. The exhibits were prominently displayed on a table in front of the Magistrate. The prisoners were handcuffed and were escorted to the Court under a strong armed guard.

When the hearing of the case began the Magistrate, Mr. Alfred Keyser, asked at the outset : " Is Vasudeo Balvant defended ? "

The Government pleader : " I don't know your Worship. "

The remark of the Government pleader alarmed the spectators when through one of the doors of the court room, hurriedly entered the Court Poona's revered Sarvajani Kaka, throwing back on his shoulder the loose end of his white upper-cloth. Suspense and anxiety were writ large upon his face. As he started towards the seats reserved for the counsels the curious eyes of the onlookers moved on with him. Kaka reached his seat and standing erect announced to the Magistrate in grim silence : " I have come to appear for accused No. 1—Vasudeo Balvant Phadke ! "

<sup>4</sup> Prof. N. R. Phatak, *Life of Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade* (Marathi), p. 320.

The announcement struck the people like lightning striking a calm ocean and thrilled them. Vasudeo Balvant himself was stunned with a pleasant surprise. The Magistrate also felt amazed at the fearlessness of the Poona leaders, and called upon the prosecution counsel to proceed with the case. Mr. Chintaman Pandurang Late, a prominent member of the Poona Bar, subsequently assisted Sarvajanik Kaka in the case.

On 22nd October, Major Daniell and eleven other witnesses for the prosecution were examined. Major Daniell narrated the happenings which took place up to the arrest of Vasudeo Balvant and produced in Court, the Government sanctions for prosecuting Vasudeo Balvant under different sections of the Indian Penal Code for offences against the State. Two students, the brother-in-law of Vasudeo Balvant and two Ramoshis narrated the activities of Vasudeo Balvant in Poona and elsewhere. Before the Court rose for the day the Magistrate announced his intention to finish off the case as expeditiously as possible, sitting even without any recess for lunch if necessary.

Sarvajanik Kaka then had a prolonged interview with his famous client in the Court. It was his first meeting with the revolutionary leader since his revolt began.

The Magistrate had ordered the dispersal of the crowd first. Vasudeo Balvant welcomed the decision as it would provide him with a clear way out. Raising his hands which were manacled, he asked his comrades and others to proceed first. He was then separated from the rest of the accused, and taken to the military cells at Ghorpadi. The other prisoners were taken to the district jail.

Next day, on 23rd October, the number of spectators in the Court greatly increased. A large number of villagers around Poona had come to watch the proceedings. Several Europeans were amongst the spectators. A Ramoshi, who was already undergoing imprisonment as a convict in a case arising out of the raids, entered the witness-box first. But he refused to depose anything against Vasudeo Balvant. The Court repeatedly assured him that he would not get more punishment if he told the truth. But the Ramoshi categorically denied that he had any connection with Vasudeo Balvant. He said that he had received no pay from Vasudeo Balvant and did not even know him. There was a mild sensation in the court room at this loyalty of the ex-insurgent to his leader. Another Ramoshi, also a convict in a similar case, refused to say anything whatever, and had to be taken back to the jail.

Although the Court was heavily guarded the police did not

feel reassured, and Vasudeo Balvant had been handcuffed during the hearing. After the Ramoshi witnesses were examined the Magistrate noticed the accused handcuffed and got annoyed. He scolded the police officers saying : " Never keep the prisoner with the handcuffs on in the Court without my orders."

Vasudeo Balvant : " I was handcuffed the whole of yesterday."

The Magistrate : " Yes ! Indeed ! I was not aware of that ! "

The Magistrate ordered the handcuffs of Vasudeo Balvant to be removed, which was immediately done by the police.

Mahadeo Govind Karmarkar, a clerk in the Small Cause Court, Poona, and persons, whose houses were looted by the insurgents, then gave evidence in the case.

The witness, who next stepped into the witness-box, was a valuable tool in the hands of the prosecution in procuring the evidence about the secret activities of Vasudeo Balvant. He was Rango Moreswar Mahajan at whose house Vasudeo Balvant had drawn up his plans while underground.

The Government pleader declared at this stage that no further witnesses except the Rohillas from Hyderabad would be called for the prosecution in the Magistrate's Court.

The Magistrate : " If these witnesses come tomorrow I will proceed with the case even tomorrow ! "

Friday, the 24th October, was the Vijayadashmi day. As it dawned recollections of past vows taken by him on the auspicious day crowded Vasudeo Balvant's mind. He was sad that his hopes to accomplish the goal of liberating his country was lying in the dust on this Vijayadashmi day.

The Rohillas from Hyderabad arrived in Poona on the morning of 25th October and the hearing of the case continued before Mr. Keyser, on 25th October. Mahajan was recalled to the witness-box. He read out a letter from Bhaskar Jyotishi, which described Vasudeo Balvant as a patriot of no common type and a man who had devoted his life to the welfare of the country. Five important Rohilla witnesses were then examined on the attempt of Vasudeo Balvant to raise the new army in July 1879. Vasudeo Balvant rose in the dock, demanding cross-examination of these witnesses. But Sarvajanic Kaka intervened and said that he had reserved their cross-examination for the Sessions Court.

Vasudeo Balvant to the Magistrate : " I have been kept all along in close confinement and am unable to take my daily exercise. It makes me restless."

The Magistrate : " I will write to the jail authorities to grant

you permission to take sufficient exercise and freely walk in the open every day ! ”

The Court then rose for the day.

Monday, the 27th October, was the last day of the preliminary hearing of the case. The statements of the accused were read in the Court and the accused were further examined by the Magistrate with regard to the contents of their statements. The Court then asked Vasudeo Balvant : “ Do you wish to call any witnesses on your behalf ? ”

Vasudeo Balvant : “ I have a long list of twenty-three witnesses.”

The list was presented to the Court. As Vasudeo Balvant hesitated to explain the reasons of citing some witnesses mentioned in the list Mr. Chintaman Pandurang Late suggested that the accused might have been reluctant to give the reasons in the presence and within the hearing of the police officers. The Magistrate agreed to receive the reasons in writing later on.

Charges were then formally framed against Vasudeo Balvant and his companions under different sections of the Indian Penal Code and they were committed to the Sessions.

Vasudeo Balvant along with other accused was charged under Section 395 of the Indian Penal Code with committing dacoities at Dhamari, Valhe, Chandkhed and other places. He was further charged under Section 400 of the Code with belonging to a party of persons associated for the purpose of habitually committing dacoities. He was also charged under Section 121A of the Code with conspiring to wage war against the Queen, within and without British India, under Section 122 of the Code with collecting men, arms, ammunition or otherwise preparing to wage war with the intention of either waging or being prepared to wage war against the Queen and under Section 124A of the Code with exciting feelings of disaffection to the Government established by law in British India. The last three charges were for offences against the State. The sections of the Indian Penal Code under which the charges were framed acquired conspicuous notoriety, when celebrated Indian patriots were prosecuted and got convicted under them by the British Government. But Vasudeo Balvant was the first Indian to be tried under these sections in this country.

After committing the accused to the Sessions the Magistrate left the court room. The police had to struggle hard to control the crowd in the court room before they could escort Vasudeo Balvant out of the Court to the special *shigram* which carried him to the military cells at Ghorpadi.

## CHAPTER XVII

### TRANSPORTATION FOR LIFE

**T**HE serious charges on which Vasudeo Balvant was placed on trial meant death for the gallant patriot in the opinion of the people. People are often moved with strange fantasies. They, therefore, lent ready currency to the well-known contemporary rumour that the British Government would execute the death sentence on Vasudeo Balvant by burning him alive in the funnel of a steamship. In course of time, the rumour crystallised into a general supposition that he was in fact burnt alive by the British Government. It was not unusual for the present author to meet people of the present generation who asked with some certainty : " Vasudeo Balvant was burnt alive by the British Government in the funnel of a steamship. Is it not ? " They had of course to be disappointed by being told that it was not so. The supposition, however, indicates the common man's estimate of the serious nature of the offences with which Vasudeo Balvant was charged. When the Governor of Bombay longed to secure capital punishment for the patriot the public inclination to come to such conclusion appears to be quite natural.

Patriots in Poona strained every nerve to rally the strongest defence for Vasudeo Balvant at his Sessions trial. The defence was entrusted by them to a leading luminary of the Bombay Bar. He possessed exceptional legal acumen, and had a lucrative practice at the Bombay High Court. He would have easily occupied the coveted chair of the judge of the Bombay High Court, but for some circumstances which could not be ignored by the Government. He had no issue and bequeathed his wealth to the famous charitable institution of Poona, Anandashram, under a trust. The distinguished counsel was Mr. Mahadeo Chimnaji Apte. With his appearance as the defence counsel at the trial of Vasudeo Balvant it could be said that the utmost possible legal assistance was given by the nation to Vasudeo Balvant.

Vasudeo Balvant with fourteen of his companions went on trial at the Sessions Court at Poona on 3rd November 1879. The trial was held in the spacious building of the Sessions Court near the Sangam before Mr. W. H. Newnham. The court room covered by coir mats was swarmed by spectators who squatted



in the court room since morning, on 3rd November 1879. A number of European civilians and soldiers were present in the Court. The court room was soon packed to capacity, and the compound outside also was densely thronged by a jostling crowd of spectators. Some over-enthusiastic visitors continued to peep inside the Court through open windows to catch a glimpse of the proceedings. They also scaled the parapets and jammed the approaches to the court room where they were somehow halted by the police. Even the prosecution and defence counsels had to enter the Court with difficulty and had no chairs until their seats were cleared of the intruders. The atmosphere inside the court room was oppressively hot with human breath.<sup>1</sup>

The central figure in the engrossing drama, Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, had not arrived in the Court as yet. Special arrangement had been made for his safe escort to the Court. A closed *shigram* was kept in readiness in front of his cell in the military prison at Ghorpadi where he was lodged. He was handcuffed and shackled, and taken to the Court in the *shigram* closely guarded on all sides by mounted European troops.

When the *shigram* drove up to the porch of the Sessions Court punctually at ten o'clock the military and police officers opened its door, and the tall figure of Vasudeo Balvant alighted from it. The escort heaved a sigh of relief that there was no encounter on the way with any of the prisoner's erstwhile companions eager to set him free. Their fear was not unfounded. For only a few days previously, Pandu Ramoshi, one of the followers of Vasudeo Balvant, had arrived in Poona. The police had cornered him in a city locality. But he escaped and repaired to a forsaken house in Bhamburda. In the skirmish which took place he had fired a revolver at the police and had to be shot down.

Vasudeo Balvant was dressed in white clothes freshly washed clean. He was wearing a white garment and a white upper-cloth with a white flannel jacket. A white *pheta* held his rebellious locks of hair in check. Bare-footed and sun-burnt, he entered the Court with dignified steps and proceeded to the dock where his co-accused had already occupied their seats. His countenance reflecting a composed mind surprised his guards. He entered the dock and occupied the seat reserved for him as accused No. 1. The guards closed the small door of the dock and stood to attention outside.

Vasudeo Balvant looked about and a surging crowd eagerly

<sup>1</sup> *A Report of the Trial of Wasudev Bulwant Phadkey*, printed at the Daily Telegraph and Deccan Herald Press, Poona.

watching him demonstrated to him the deep love his countrymen felt for him. In front of the Judge's chair, was seen in a semi-circle a row of tables and chairs for the counsels. On the left were the seats for the special correspondents of prominent Anglo-Indian newspapers like the *Bombay Gazette*, the *Times of India*, and the *Deccan Herald*, which had traduced Vasudeo Balvant and also nationalist papers like the *Deccan Star*, the *Dnyanachakshu* and the *Arunodaya*, which had vigorously defended him as a selfless soul in the darkest hour of his life.

On the other side of the Judge, on a white mattress and a cushioned seat was sitting the aged Shirastedar of the Sessions Court, Dada Phatak, to record the proceedings in Marathi. In his front on the same side of the Judge were the fine polished chairs of the jurors.

The Judge, Mr. Newnham, entered the Court exactly at eleven o'clock. The prisoners were then formally arraigned under different sections of the Indian Penal Code and the charges were read out to them. All the accused pleaded "not guilty" to the charges and claimed to be tried. All of them were represented by counsels. Mr. Mahadeo Chimnaji Apte, assisted by Mr. Chintaman Pandurang Late, appeared for Vasudeo Balvant. Mr. Late was a leading legal practitioner of Poona and his appearance at the trial as counsel for Vasudeo Balvant indicates the sympathy of educated classes for Vasudeo Balvant.

The Government pleader of Bombay, Mr. Nanabhai Haridas, led the prosecution. As a lawyer he was a worthy rival of Mr. Apte, counsel for the defence. For Mr. Apte, although he richly deserved the High Court Judgeship, nevertheless failed to adorn it, while Mr. Nanabhai in fact became the first Indian Judge of the Bombay High Court on 8th November 1880.

The Court Havaladar set a closed metal casket rolling on its axis in front of the Judge. He then opened it, took out from it five pieces of paper bearing the names of the jurors and handed them over to the Shirastedar. The Jury thus empanelled consisted of (1) Mr. Narayan Pandurang Banvalkar (Foreman), (2) Mr. Vinayak Raghunath Navalkar, (3) Mr. Narayan Somayya, (4) Mr. Samuel Raymon, (5) Mr. Visaji Chintaman Gore.

Asked if they challenged any of the jurors, all the accused replied in the negative.

In front of the jurors were placed on a table several exhibits in the case. They included guns, swords, chest-guards, lathis, a number of ornaments of gold, silver, diamond, pearls and rubies, lamps, stripes, horns, pistols, daggers, and other weapons.

Opening the prosecution case against the accused, Mr. Nana-

bhai Haridas said : "Gentlemen of the Jury, the prisoners at the bar are charged with several offences in this case. Accused No. 1 Vasudeo Balvant Phadke is charged with many offences, three of which are offences against the State. The other prisoners are charged with committing dacoities and being members of a party of persons associated for habitually committing dacoities.

Vasudeo Balvant is charged under Section 121A of the Indian Penal Code with conspiring to wage war against the Queen-Empress and under Section 122 of the Code with collecting men, arms, ammunition or otherwise preparing to wage war against the Queen. He is also charged under Section 124A of the Code with attempting to excite disaffection against the Government established by law, under Section 400 with being a member of a party of persons associated for the purpose of habitually committing dacoities and under Section 395 with committing dacoities at Dhamari, Valhe, Chandkhed and other places.

"It is useless for me," Mr. Nanabhai Haridas said, "to define to you what a dacoity is ; because you are doubtless familiar with the implications of this offence.

"The chief object of Vasudeo Balvant was to overthrow and destroy the British Government in India. The evidence to be adduced before you will adequately establish the three offences against the State with which he is charged. How was his object to overthrow the British Raj to be accomplished ? He could not single-handedly fulfil his object. He required men for the purpose and men could not be had without money. Vasudeo Balvant's first aim was to secure the sinews of war required for his revolt. He tried to obtain money from some rich willing *saucars*. But he failed in the attempt.

"Even with this failure he did not abandon his mission. He thought of another expedient to accomplish his object. Unfortunately at about the same time the country was caught in the grip of a devastating famine, and the famine threw out of employment hundreds of men in several districts. These men Vasudeo Balvant decided to press into his service. He seized this opportunity of starvation of the Indian people. The recruits belonged largely to the tribes of freebooters. With their help Vasudeo Balvant thought of looting Government treasuries and procuring a booty. He thought of enlisting a large body of men in his army with the booty so procured. For thousands of men would then flock into his ranks for the money, and he could also purchase arms and ammunition for them with the booty. He established close friendship with the Ramoshis, won their confidence and began deliberations with them.

“Vasudeo Balvant commenced his organisational work in Poona itself. He opened classes for training the youths in the art of shooting, fencing and gymnastic exercises, and hundreds of youths became expert in the arts through his classes. He delivered seditious speeches to the people to win them over to his views and to get their support in his war against the British Government.

“The scene then shifts from Poona to Loni where Vasudeo Balvant invited a large number of Ramoshis to a dinner. He supplied them with arms and raised a rebellion in the form of raids on rich houses. The havoc caused by his revolt is too well known to you to merit repetition. Dhamari was looted, followed by the loots of Valhe, Chandkhed and other places. The raids obtained for him arms and money. Many people were wounded in the skirmishes and some were killed. The money was distributed among the plunderers.

“But within a few days Vasudeo discovered that the Ramoshis were expert in the art of deception—clever dacoits whose only concern was the loot they got. They did not care a jot for the future aims of their leader. Disappointed with the Ramoshis in this way, Vasudeo Balvant turned his attention to the South, to the Nizam's territory where a more warlike race of people dwelt. He went to the Rohilla quarters, in which adventure he found a willing coadjutor in Rangopant Moreshwar Mahajan. He will describe to you, Gentlemen of the Jury, the efforts of Vasudeo to enlist the Rohillas. An agreement to engage any number of men on Rs. 10 a month plus food was drawn in Marathi and was signed with a Rohilla leader. The Rohilla will be called during the trial, and you will hear from his own mouth the account of the negotiations between him and Vasudeo Balvant.

“Vasudeo Balvant, however, found that the enemies by now were closing round him. He heard of the death of Daulatrao, whom he delighted in calling a General—a Sardar—at the hands of Major Daniell. The witnesses would narrate to you, Gentlemen of the Jury, in what glowing terms Vasudeo expressed his admiration for the bravery of Daulatrao, and the curses heaped by him upon the devoted head of Major Daniell for being the cause of Daulatrao's death. These facts will be established before the Court by sufficient evidence.

“Vasudeo Balvant was, however, seized asleep in a temple by Major Daniell before these plans were matured. Major Daniell would describe the scene of Vasudeo's arrest. Major Daniell deserves greatest praise for his success, for the energy and prompt-

titude with which he effected the arrest of Vasudeo Balvant, and nipped in the bud what might have been otherwise a serious conflagration. Gentlemen of the Jury, it would be for you to say after following all the evidence adduced in the Court how far the prosecution has succeeded in establishing the case against the accused."

After the speech of Mr. Nanabhai Haridas, the sanction of the Government, under Section 465 of the Criminal Procedure Code, to prosecute Vasudeo Balvant under Sections 121A, 122 and 124A of the Indian Penal Code<sup>2</sup> and that of the Acting Political Agent at Satara for prosecuting Vasudeo Balvant for the offences committed in Pant Sacheo's territory (Bhor State)<sup>3</sup> were read. And then Major Daniell, Superintendent of Police, Poona, and the chief officer who suppressed the revolt stepped into the witness-box. Giving his evidence, Daniell said: "I know the prisoner Vasudeo Balvant Phadke. I went in pursuit of him in July last, accompanied by Mr. Stephenson, an Inspector of Police for Berar, Sayed Abdul Hakk, the Commissioner of Police in the Nizam's Dominions, and other officials. I was also assisted by a colleague of Vasudeo Balvant in the Military Finance Office at Poona and armed police and the military."

Daniell said: "All of us arrived at Gannoor or Gangapur on the bank of the river Bhima, on 20th July 1879." He added: "We received information that Vasudeo Balvant had crossed the river Bhima and passed on to the other bank. We also crossed the river and pursued him from village to village until we found him in a temple at Devar Navadgi on the morning of 21st July. We found him fast asleep with a carpet bag taken for a pillow. He was accompanied by a companion who is not before the Court. I arrested both of them and searched them."

Major Daniell detailed the list of articles recovered from Vasudeo Balvant, and described the fierce resistance the latter offered while being arrested.

Cross-examined by Mr. Apte, Counsel for Vasudeo Balvant, Daniell said: "A man named Gopal Moreshwar was arrested along with Vasudeo Balvant. I cannot say where he is at present. He was discharged on his own recognisance after he was detained in custody from time to time, there being no charge against him. I cannot tell if he was ever taken before a Magistrate. Another man, Rangopant Mahajan, was among the arrested persons. He

<sup>2</sup> No. 127P of 1879, Judicial Department, Bombay Castle, dated 18th October 1879.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from the Acting Political Agent at Satara, dated 22nd October 1879.

has been made a Queen's witness. The other persons who were arrested when we apprehended Vasudeo Balvant were subsequently released. Rangopant was in police custody till Vasudeo Balvant was arrested; but was released afterwards. He came forward as a willing witness for the Crown. He was brought to Poona while still in custody. Vasudeo Balvant was in very much the same condition when he was arrested, as he is now. He got a little fever after his arrest, probably due to agitation. I visited him in the jail two or three times. I was not present when his statements were taken by Mr. Keyser in the jail."

Further cross-examined, Daniell told the Court that the diary and the autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant had been in his (Daniell's) own possession under lock and key and said: "They were afterwards sent to the Legal Remembrancer along with other papers. Major Wise translated the diary and the autobiography in English with the assistance of Shivram Pandurang, the Inspector of Police, Poona. To the best of my recollection, none of my subordinates had access to them in my absence. I have not initialled every page of the documents at the end. I lived with Mr. Keyser in the same bungalow until yesterday. I am not a relation of Mr. Keyser."

The documents seized from Vasudeo Balvant were then shown to the jury. In reply to a question by the Court, Vasudeo Balvant admitted the diary and the autobiography to be in his own handwriting. He said the diary was written as it was to be read out, and the autobiography was written when he was running temperature.

Parshuram Narayan Patankar, a Poona student, deposed: "I am a student of the Poona High School. I am nineteen years of age. I know Vasudeo Balvant for the last two years. He used to teach me fencing and exercise in long sword at his house. Speaking about Ramoshis, he once said to me: 'I am going to induce them to rise against the Government and you all must assist me.'"

During the cross-examination this student witness expressed his inability to tell the Court how the police knew of his connection with Vasudeo Balvant. But he added: "I had been in police custody for many days before Vasudeo Balvant was arrested."

Bala Kashinath Kunte, brother-in-law of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, giving evidence at the trial, said: "My other name is Ganesh Kashinath Kunte. I know Vasudeo Balvant. He is my brother-in-law. Many youths used to come to the house of Vasudeo Balvant. There were guns, swords, pistols, spears and

straight swords in his house. It was a regular school wherein instruction in the use of these weapons was imparted. Newspapers used to be read out and political discussions used to take place in the house. The arms were one day sent to Loni. The discussions often centred on rebellion and war!"

Vasudeo Balvant was taken aback by this deposition of his own brother-in-law; but he wondered as to what police torture had forced him to do so. Just then, however, Kunte freed himself from fear and uttered in quick succession sentences which created a sensation in the Court.

Cross-examined by Mr. Apte, Counsel for Vasudeo Balvant, Kunte admitted that Vasudeo Balvant had a licence for firearms which were found in his house, and disclosed that he had mentioned this to Nana Fouzdar (the Sub-Inspector of Poona). Kunte further said: "I was once at the house of Nana Fouzdar the whole night. I was released the next morning after I told him what he wanted. I was tutored about what I was to say in this Court. I said: 'That is not the case!' But the Fouzdar threatened me: 'If you do not tell the Court as I ask you to tell you will die tomorrow.' Under this threat I told the Court what I told just now. But it is not true."

Kunte retracted his former statement, swinging the spectators from surprise to satisfaction.

In an atmosphere of rapidly mounting excitement Kunte further said: "What I said about sending of arms to Loni is false. I said that through fear of the police torture. I was under the sway of that fear till five minutes ago. Now it has disappeared. I am asked to tell the truth and I am telling the truth. My evidence in the lower court was given under threat of police torture. That newspapers used to be read in the house of Vasudeo Balvant is true. Except this, all I have told against Vasudeo Balvant is false. There were no arms. I don't know if any were sent to Loni. Vasudeo Balvant never had guns and other weapons and never talked of overthrowing the British Government. He used to speak only about household affairs."

The Court: "The witness seems to have turned hostile. He has perjured himself." To Kunte: "Attend the Court until the trial is over. Don't absent yourself."

Kunte thus turned hostile; but paid the penalty for the same afterwards. He was tried for perjury, convicted and was sentenced to eighteen stripes with rattan. But he willingly faced the ordeal.

The excitement created by Kunte had not subsided when the next prosecution witness, Sitaram Bhalchandra Dhar-

wadkar, said : " I cannot say if accused No. 1 is Vasudeo Balvant himself. I had seen him only once." Dharwadkar also said during his cross-examination that he had been in police custody for some days and added : " I have seen the Ramoshis collected at Vasudeo Balvant's house. I have been brought down to Poona from Wai on suspicion of having complicity in a dacoity."

Arjuna Hanamanta, a Ramoshi, next deposed : " I used to meet Vasudeo Balvant at the temple of Murlidhar. He asked me to get two hundred men. I said I could not. I told the Chief Constable of my meetings with Vasudeo Balvant. He took me to Major Daniell. Major Daniell questioned me and took me to the Finance Office to identify the man with whom I had spoken in the Murlidhar Temple. The man was not there ! "

Cross-examined by defence counsel, the Ramoshi disclosed that he had since been employed by Major Daniell as a special Kamdar on the railway.

\* The Court at this stage rose for the day. When Vasudeo Balvant appeared in the porch of the Court on his way to the jail hundreds of people flocked to see him and his *shigram* left the court precincts amidst thunderous cheers from them.

At the resumed hearing of the case on 4th November, which, incidentally, was the 34th birthday of Vasudeo Balvant, twenty-two witnesses were examined for the prosecution. By ten o'clock the court room was fully packed. Distinguished Indians like Mr. Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy and Mr. Jamshedji Cursetji and many Europeans including Mr. Spencer (Sr.) were among the visitors. The Judge, Mr. Newnham, enquired of the pressmen at the outset if they had proper accommodation in the Court, and got a reply in the affirmative.

Ganu Raghu Ramoshi in his evidence said : " Jankoo Ramoshi came to me in the month of last Shravan and asked if I would take service. One Brahmin from Poona had come and he required men on Rs. 15 a month. Ganu was accompanied (pointing towards Vasudeo Balvant in the dock) by this Brahmin. The Brahmin had then no beard. But I have no doubt as to his identity. He is the same Brahmin who had come to me. I entered his service. I received my first salary in the last Poush."

Vasudeo Balvant was the recipient of many letters from his countrymen expressing their admiration for him. One such letter bearing his name was at this stage delivered in the Court. Mr. Apte, Counsel for Vasudeo Balvant, suggested to the Court : " The accused Vasudeo Balvant may have it ! "

The Court : " I don't mind the accused having it ! "

The letter was then handed over to Vasudeo Balvant.



Two Ramoshis, Hanamanta and Jalawanta, narrated in their deposition the account of the raid on Dhamari and the attack on two Marwari residents of the village. They confirmed the accounts given by earlier witnesses. The Ramoshis said: "Vasudeo Balvant asked us whether we would do the work of looting villages. We said: 'Give us the arms and we will do the job'." It was, however, revealed during the cross-examination of these witnesses that they were in police custody for many days past.

Mahadeo Govind Karmarkar, a young clerk in the Small Cause Court at Thana, said: "Young boys used to learn fencing and shooting at Vasudeo Balvant's house. Many Ramoshis also used to visit the house. I had met Gopal Karve, Hari Gupchup, Vishnu Patankar, Ganpatrao Sathe and others at the place. Vasudeo Balvant himself trained all of us in the arts. I don't remember whether I used to learn the exercises!"

After some police officials narrated the accounts of the skirmishes on the Chinchooosi hill and the raid on Davdi Nimbgaon, Dhondi Gopal, a gardener of Rajewadi, said: "On the night of the dacoity, I went to the hill-temple of Devaleshwar to light the lamp in front of the idol. I met the dacoits there. They said to me: 'We will arrange to light the lamp. You better quit this place.' And hearing this I fled to the village in fright."

The villagers of Valhe and Pangare described the raids on their villages. Thereafter, Moro Babaji Phatak deposed: "I am a native doctor. About six months ago, I was called in the morning to act as a *panch* at the police search of Vasudeo Balvant's house. In the course of the search (the witness said pointing to the exhibits before the Court) these two guns, these two swords, this map, these armguards, this chain breast-plate and some gunpowder were found in the house of Vasudeo Balvant."

After a few more witnesses were examined on behalf of the prosecution the clock struck five and further hearing of the case was adjourned till eleven o'clock the next day. Vasudeo Balvant was then escorted through the amorphous crowd which divided into a lane at the instance of the police to afford him a passage for getting out. He was then taken to the jail.

On 5th November, the mass of visitors to the Court was so great that many of them were unable to hear the proceedings in full. Some people had wished that the trial was held in some spacious hall. One of them had communicated his desire to the Judge Mr. Newnham who revealed this by saying: "I have received an anonymous letter signed "Pro Bono Publico", which says that the case is an important one and has attracted

वणेपरप्रार्थ नृसिंहरत्नती श्रीगुरुनाथ रक्षीलयाचे वंशो वंशी ७० प्रणेसरस्वतीगंगा  
 धर श्रोतयाकरि नमस्कार कथाएकामनोहर सकलाशीखलाधोनुस्मा ७१ ॥ श्रीगुरुचरीत्र  
 कथाकल्पतरु श्री नृसिंहरत्नचयोपारव्यानेसिंधनामधारकसेवादे श्रीगुरुमल्लिकार्जुनगमनंनम  
 एकपंचाशतप्रोच्यायः सप्राम ॥ एकदरओव्या ७१ ७४ ॥ दत्त ॥ ॥ दत्त ॥  
 हेपुलक धर्मस्थापनायावीएदर्थ यास्तदेवबळवंतफडके राहाणारशिरदाणतालुकेपनवल  
 जिल्हागणे याणीलिहिलेआरे प्रितिकानीक कृष्णपही शाके १८०० बहुधायनामसवसरेने  
 दिवत्रीसकाळी सप्राम ॥ ॥ दत्त ॥ ॥ दत्त ॥ ॥ दत्त ॥

Vasudeo Balvanti's Handwriting  
 (Last page of the manuscript of the book on Shree Datta)



Maharshi Patwardhan



Lokamanya Tilak



Mr Justice Ranade



Sarvajani Kaka



Mahadeo Chimnaji Apte



Chintaman Pandurang Late

a good deal of attention. The accommodation in the Court is not sufficient to admit all those who daily come to hear the proceedings. The trial of Vasudeo Balvant should, therefore, be held in the spacious Council Hall. I had myself thought of such arrangement some days ago, but it seemed much regard was paid to the rich carpet in the Council Hall! It is also too late to consider the suggestion now!"

The major portion of the day's proceedings was taken up by the examination of Rangopant Moreshwar Mahajan who narrated in detail the revolutionary activities of Vasudeo Balvant. In Poona Daniell had lodged Mahajan in the bungalow in which Stephenson was staying. He was tutored as to what was to be deposed by him in favour of the prosecution. He was also warned that if he refused to do so he would also be charge-sheeted and prosecuted for complicity in the conspiracy. The dreadful prospects frightened Mahajan beyond measure and he went pale with fear. He led the evidence about the activities of Vasudeo Balvant which it was otherwise so difficult for the prosecution to secure. When he began his narrative there was silence of anxiety and anger in the Court. In his deposition Mahajan said: "I am a resident of Gangapur where I am a clerk at the toll *naka*. I do not know English. Hari Govind Mahajan, residing in the Shukrawar Peth in Poona, is my uncle. I became acquainted with accused No. 1, Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, at Bardalla near Gangapur three years ago. Bardalla is four miles from Gangapur. Vasudeo Balvant stayed at my house for a day on that occasion. He was on his way to Gangapur. Seven to eight months thereafter I came to Poona on my way to Konkan and put up with Vasudeo. I saw in his house arms, including muskets, swords and long swords. Vasudeo had a dagger with him when he came to Bardalla.

"Vasudeo came to my house," continued Mahajan, "in the last Chaitra accompanied by Gopal Moreshwar. He had a beard of two or three months' growth, and a sword and a treasure containing silver and gold. He intended to offer some gold to the deity—Dattatraya. Vasudeo was on his way to Shree Shaila Mallikarjun. He melted down his gold and silver into gold and silver bars at Gangapur. He said it was pawned to him. He had a costly shawl and the priest of the temple at Gangapur asked for it. But Vasudeo said: 'I have this only shawl at present with me. But if you come to Poona I will give you as many shawls as you want.' Vasudeo presented me with some rubies as mementos.

"The *Dnyanachakshu* and some other newspapers used to come in my name at my house. I also was a subscriber to that

paper. The *Dnyanachakshu* contained the account of the search going on for Vasudeo after he left Poona. I drew Vasudeo's attention to the account. Vasudeo admitted that he had committed dacoities and had been living in the hills with Ramoshis for some months past.

"Vasudeo left for Shree Shaila Mallikarjun," Mahajan proceeded, "in the company of Gopal who returned after a month followed by Vasudeo five or six days afterwards. Both of them lived in the Datta Mandir at the Sangam at Gangapur. Vasudeo was laid up with fever."

Pointing out to the newspapers in the exhibits, Mahajan said: "I remember the day on which these issues of the *Dnyanachakshu* were delivered at my house. One of them reported the Poona fires and the other the death of Daulatrao. Vasudeo was visibly moved on hearing the latter news, shed tears and wept, lamenting the death of Daulatrao. Recounting his pleasant days with Daulatrao, Vasudeo said: 'Daulatrao was a hero.' He cursed Major Daniell in anger for causing the death of one so brave. He said: 'The buildings have been burnt to no purpose. But it is good that the Government has sustained a loss.' Vasudeo hoped to resume his operations after collecting two to three hundred men and to overthrow the British Raj. Vasudeo said he had intended to attack and loot the Poona treasury; but a Mussalman peached and the project had to be abandoned.

"I contacted the Rohilla leaders on Vasudeo's behalf for enlisting the Rohillas in his band." After telling the Court all about the negotiations with the Rohillas and others, Mahajan said: "It was decided to execute an agreement with them, and it was written by me according to Vasudeo's dictation. Vasudeo was known in the Datta Mandir as "Kashikar Bawa". Within a few days his condition grew worse and he shifted to my residence and took his meals at my house."

After narrating Vasudeo Balvant's plan of an armed revolt, Mahajan said: "I wrote the address on the letter sent to his brother. He gave me a letter from Bhaskar Jyotishi of Benares to Moulvi Mohomed of Hyderabad for safe-keeping."

Mahajan said: "Major Daniell came to Gangapur in last Shravan. He was in search of Vasudeo. I cautioned Vasudeo against this. Vasudeo left my house and resided in the temple in the garden. The Rohillas were to be paid for their services. I, therefore, offered to go to bring the money from a certain place. But Vasudeo did not approve of my proposal and himself started to bring it from Pandharpur."

"Vasudeo's *daftar* with important papers," Mahajan concluded, "was with me. It contained copies of counter-proclamations signed by Vasudeo Balvant offering a reward of Rs. 5,000 for the head of the Governor and lesser rewards for lesser European officials. My mother destroyed them at my instance when Major Daniell arrived at Gangapur."

Mahajan was then subjected to a gruelling cross-examination by Mr. Apte, Counsel for Vasudeo Balvant, who extracted some statements of material importance from him in favour of his client. Cross-examined by Mr. Apte, Mahajan said: "I am putting up with Mr. Stephenson in his bungalow although my uncle lives in Poona in his own house. But I am not under police surveillance. Vasudeo did not issue his proclamations in my presence. All his papers were destroyed by my mother. I am a subscriber to some newspapers and so some of them come to my house in my own name."

Janojirao Yashwantrao, a Mahratta resident of Annoor, said: "Accused No. 1 (Vasudeo Balvant) had been to Annoor along with Mahajan two or three months ago. He was called Maharaj. The Maharaj required men on Rs. 10 a month plus free food. They had a conversation with Ismailkhan about it when Shaikh Shahabuddin, Hassankhan Sherekhan, Shaikh Sondoo, Sayed Husenkhan and Shaikh Husenkhan were present. 'What is our work?' they asked and Maharaj replied: 'We are to revolt against the British Government and loot and plunder'."

Shaikh Shahabuddin Shaikh Imam said: "Rangopant had come to the Rohilla quarters at Annoor with (pointing to Vasudeo Balvant in the dock) this Maharaj when Ismailkhan, Sayed Husen, myself and other Rohillas were present. Rangopant and the Maharaj asked me whether I would take up service. I asked: 'Where?' Maharaj said: 'You will have to live in the jungle by daytime and loot the British territory at night and fight the English. You will get Rs. 10 a month plus free food as salary.' A written agreement to that effect was accordingly executed."

Ismailkhan Karimkhan, appearing as a witness for the prosecution, denied, as expected, the account about the agreement for enlisting Rohillas, and said that the story was false. He also said that as the face of the other man accompanying Rangopant was covered he could not recognise the other man as accused No. 1 in the Court. This inclination of Ismailkhan to deny the execution of any agreement with Vasudeo Balvant was fully exploited in favour of the defence by Mr. Apte, Counsel for Vasudeo Balvant, during the cross-examination. In reply

to a question by Mr. Apte, Ismailkhan replied : " I am a native of the territory beyond Peshawar. My mother tongue is Pushtu ; I do not know Marathi."

As the other Hyderabad witnesses were going to give almost identical evidence the Judge suggested that they may simply be called up and submitted to the other side for cross-examination as is usually done in such cases.

Hassankhan Sherekhan in his evidence in the lower court had told all the above-mentioned facts and added : " The Maharaj agreed to give the Jamadar a salary of Rs. 25 a month plus free food. He said he would employ as many men as would come forth. Ismailkhan agreed to the proposal. He also promised to consult his people as regards accepting the service. I myself refused to do so ! The Maharaj was speaking with a covered face. Rangopant said : ' The Maharaj is sick and so cannot expose himself to cold.' But I have no doubt that the Maharaj was the same person as accused No. 1."

Shaikh Sondoo Shaikh Ahmed had narrated all the above account and further said : " The Maharaj said at the conference : ' The English are my enemies and you are to plunder the British territory.' I refused to take up service under him. But Ismailkhan executed the written agreement and it was handed over to the Maharaj."

Sayed Husenkhan had said : " When the Maharaj said, ' The British are our enemies,' we protested, ' They are not our enemies ! ' "

These Hyderabad witnesses giving identical evidence were tendered for cross-examination. But Mr. Apte, Counsel for Vasudeo Balvant, declined to avail himself of the opportunity.

Babaji Narayan Joshi, a turban-winder from Wai and a prosecution witness, was in prison in connection with two dacoities. When he entered the witness-box there was again a sensation in the Court. Joshi became remorseful about his deposition against Vasudeo Balvant in the lower court and like Kunte he also retracted his statements. He said : " When I last gave evidence I was suffering from fever ! "

The Judge : " You were not."

Witness : " Vasudeo did not say that the British Government should be overthrown. He said he was working for the good of the Hindus. It is not true that I saw people from Bhore in his house. I never used to see Ramoshis at his house always. I might have seen them there at times. Vasudeo never told the people from Bhore to join the *bund* (revolt) in my presence."

Mr. Nanabhai Haridas : " You have told the lower court that

Vasudeo Balvant had said that 'it was his intention to establish Hindu religion and Hindu Raj and overthrow the British Government'."

Witness: "Some Ramoshis talked about committing dacoities. But he said it was no use doing so. He used to say that he wanted to re-establish the Hindu religion. But he never said that he wanted to overthrow the British Government."

Asked again to state which of his statements was true, Joshi maintained that his deposition in the Sessions Court was true. He also added: "My evidence in the lower court is not true. I have been in the police custody for many days past after having been arrested at Wai for participating in dacoities. I am still in the Pharaskhana."

Judge: "The witness is already in police custody. Otherwise I would certainly have prosecuted him for perjury."

The Judge told Joshi to attend the Court every day till the trial was over.

Mr. Nanabhai Haridas, counsel for the prosecution, told the Court that there were only two more prosecution witnesses to be examined. They would be produced the following day.

On 6th November, the fourth day of the trial, there was the largest number of people present in the Court. For people expected on that day to hear the challenging statement of Vasudeo Balvant and the judgment in the case. They could not, however, hear the judgment as the trial did not end that day.

Durgabai Moreshwar Mahajan told the Court that she knew Vasudeo Balvant as 'Kashikar Bawa'. She added: "Rangoo handed over to me the papers belonging to Vasudeo. I destroyed them after his arrest by throwing them into the river!"

The prosecution counsel, Mr. Nanabhai Haridas, told the Court that he had no more witnesses to call on behalf of the prosecution.

Vasudeo Balvant had no hope of a favourable decision in the case. So he did not call any witness on his behalf although he had drawn up a lengthy list of his witnesses, in the lower court.

Vasudeo Balvant's statement in the Court comprised of the queries of the Judge about the entries and assertions in his diary and autobiography and his replies thereto, some of which were evasive and so worded as to suit the legal proceedings before a court of law. He, however, never regretted what he had done nor did he pray to the Court for mercy. He was convicted on the strength of his diary and autobiography. The indictment of the British rule, the expression of his insuppressible passion for freedom and the agony of his heart for his unhappy country-



men as well as the proclamation of the goal of an Indian Republic contained in the latter document went down to posterity as his fearless statement before the Court, pertinent extracts from which are given below. In those days, when the whole nation was cowed down by the terror of a mighty empire, each word and thought in the statement could be uttered only by a man with a lion's heart. It has, therefore, become a precious legacy for the nation for all time to come. Vasudeo Balvant said: "The inhabitants of India are reduced to death by starvation under the British rule. . . . Their external policy is generous, internal treacherous !

"One Indian was to be appointed to a high position, and the newspapers trumpeted that many appointments are being given to Indians. Scarcely had the clothes of Indian manufacture begun to get into demand when the British Government opened a new appointment for a European in the Viceregal Legislative Council at Calcutta on a salary of Rupees five thousand a month. This new officer removed the tax on the cloth of English manufacture. The number of districts was increased from fourteen to twenty-one and the number would still increase. This meant that seven new Collectors and seven new Judges with more than two thousand rupees as monthly salary also came to be appointed. If a European military officer does meritorious service in India he is paid Rs. 75,000 as gratuity on his retirement.

"The European officers thus get lacs of rupees more than the Indians. Whose is this money? Is this their father's money? Is it got for nothing? It is a disgrace to both Hindus and Mohammedans. It would have been better had we all died.

"They opened famine works. But a grant of only one and a half anna a day was made as the daily wages when grain was selling at five seers per rupee. This grant was nothing better than the talk of sweet words. It was to say: 'Eat the food,' but to show by signs: 'If you eat it, you will be beaten.'

"There are thousands of examples of such deception. Has anybody ever taken the trouble of enquiring about it? Now what does all this mean? It only means to gather money, to colonise this country and to destroy the religion !

"Thinking day and night of this and thousand other miseries, my mind had been wholly bent upon the downfall of the British power in India. I thought of nothing else. While answering the nature's call, while bathing, while going through the ablutions, at dinner and in bed—and I had no sleep for hours together at times because of these thoughts—the idea haunted my mind. I used to rise up in the dead of night, and ponder

over the destruction of the British rule until I went almost mad with the idea!

"Here cultivation is made by canal-water, and had the Government freely supplied this water and food to our men for two months, the harvest would have been prosperous and lasted the people for one year. There would have been no necessity of importing foodgrains, and my countrymen would not have died of starvation. The Government, however, assumes a false colour of charity by saying that it saves the people by importing foodgrains for them, and on the ground that great expenses have been incurred by the State in adopting measures to free the people from starvation imposes fresh taxes and licence fees.

"I have all along been considering how I could save the thousands of poor people who are dying of starvation and reduced to skeletons. I have spent every pie and pice of mine in this cause. I went to Shree Shaila Mallikarjun and other holy places for prayers in the same cause. But if I should not succeed in my plans I thought of destroying myself in the cause.

"People are much disaffected. If a beginning be made by a few men those who are starving may join in the hope that they will be in the end successful.

"I learnt how to fire, ride and fence and how to wield the spear. I was very fond of arms and always had with me two or three guns, four or five swords and spears and long swords.

"Patriotism was strong in me. I prayed to God that my life be taken, but my countrymen made happy. I gave up applying the *gandha* to my forehead, grew up my beard and hair and took a beggar's *zoli* under my arm. I also gave up wearing the turban.

"I went on leave many times and visited Nasik, Ahmednagar, Khandesh, Ujjain; Indore, Baroda, Nagpur, Kolhapur, Miraj, Sangli and many other places. My first duty during the visits was to rouse the minds of the people against the British Government. I also succeeded in creating ill-feeling against the British Government in the minds of the Kolis, Gonds, and Bhils of those places. I used to invite the Ramoshis of the surrounding districts to dinner. I gave them food, liquor and presented them with turbans.

"I began to deliver lectures. I first delivered my lectures at Poona and then at Palaspe, Panvel, Narsobachi Wadi, and other places. They might still be in the possession of many. But to no purpose. They had no more effect on the minds of the people than sprinkling of water on the leaves has on the life of the tree. Most of us Indians are fools. They want

reward at once. There is hardly one in a thousand who thinks of the futurity.

"These dying people are children born of the same motherland of which I was born. That they should die of starvation, crying for food, that this country like America should become the colony of the British and I should earn my petty livelihood like a dog, I could not bear. It is far preferable to ascend to heaven as an ambassador to represent the interests of the Indians there—to die and relieve in heaven the sufferings of the people of India when there is no worldly remedy for the alleviation of the misery of my countrymen.

"Not caring in the least I gave up my service and resolved to gather money by looting. The booty, I thought, would enable me to engage bands of fighting men and a beginning could be made. An infant cannot possess the strength of a grown-up man. It takes weary months and years before it comes to maturity. So why could not a small rebellion raised on a strong footing lead to the establishment of our Raj? Thinking minutely about all this, I took my mixed bands to carry out my plans and commenced my work.

"Then we looted Dhamari, Valhe and other places. We looted Chandkhed at night. But here I was told that the Ramoshis were not delivering all the booty, and that, thereafter, my plans would not work with their help. I was suffering at this time from fever, and did not know how long I would be laid up with fever. I, therefore, gave up hope in the Ramoshis and went to Shree Shaila Mallikarjun."

Giving an indication of his plan of revolt after he had collected sufficient money, Vasudeo Balvant said: "I would have sent my men in different parts of the country to raise a rebellion months in advance. Such simultaneous outbreaks in all parts of India would have created quite a panic in the European community. Daks then would have been stopped. Railway lines and telegraph wires would have been cut and broken down. All communications would have been stopped, and news would not have travelled from one part of the country to another. Then there would have been an opportunity to break open the jails. Long-term convicts in the jails would have readily joined us. For they would have been afraid that if the British Raj were again to be established they would be re-arrested. Nothing would have been known as to the strength of our forces and when and where we were and thousands of ignorant people would have joined us. It would have then been a peculiar phenomenon and our object of establishing an

*Indian Republic* (by driving the British out of India) would have been entirely fulfilled! Perhaps only the stars in the heavens might then have saved the English!

"But our people are backward in furthering a good object. They would be glad if the pretentious regime of the British is destroyed! But would say: 'Do not ask us for money or assistance.' What can be expected of them in my enterprise?"

"Oh, Ye, all Indians and my Brethren, I fall at your feet in salutation for the last time. I am going to sacrifice my own life for your welfare and enter the Court of God as a *vakeel* for you! I have always respected all other women as my mothers and their treasure is quite loathsome to me. If any such wealth has come to my hands unknowingly it was spent on nothing else than the sacred cause!"

"I do not dread God. I go to join issue with him. I have done nothing superhuman in this (sacrificing my all for your cause). The sage Dadhichi also had given his bones for the good of Gods! I also, therefore, pray to God with folded hands that he may take my life, but make you all happy, and salute you for the last time!"

Vasudeo Balvant apologised to his countrymen for his failure to liberate the country and said: "But, alas! Good fruit was not reaped. But God alone knows that I did this all for your good! Oh, Ye, all Indians and my Countrymen, you have not derived any benefit from me. I could not accomplish my goal. Please pardon me for this failure."

After the evidence in favour of other prisoners was recorded, the prosecution counsel, Mr. Nanabhai Haridas, commenced his argument for the prosecution. Mr. Nanabhai Haridas said: "Gentlemen of the Jury, the case presented by me to you against the accused in my opening address has now been fully established, and the object of Vasudeo Balvant to overthrow the British Government is fully made out. He had collected men and money at different places. His diary and autobiography bear out his object of waging war against the British Government. From morning to evening he thought of nothing else."

Mr. Nanabhai read at considerable length relevant extracts from the recorded evidence and quoted extensively from the diary and the autobiography in support of his assertions. He then asked: "Is this not the evidence of an intention to wage war against the Queen-Empress? Vasudeo Balvant had kept this purpose constantly before him. He enlisted hundreds of Ramoshis in his band for the same purpose. That he parti-

ipated in the dacoities is clear from the evidence presented to you and the admissions in his diary and autobiography. In several dacoities Vasudeo Balvant took a prominent lead."

Mr. Nanabhai argued that the evidence of the Rohillas supported by the evidence of Rangopant Mahajan showed the activities of Vasudeo Balvant at Gangapur in pursuance of the same object. "It was the continuation of the same object of overthrowing the British Government. The proclamations issued by Vasudeo Balvant offering a reward of Rs. 5,000 for the head of the Governor and Rs. 3,000 for the head of the Collector were but indications of the same object. He had committed dacoities, collected men and money for waging war against the British Government, and made speeches spreading disaffection against the Government established by law."

Mr. Nanabhai asserted that at the first sight of the matter it might appear impossible and unlikely for Vasudeo to be able to overthrow and subvert the British Government with a handful of Ramoshis. "But," he proceeded, "I would tell you that men, who had first commenced their careers as leaders of small bands, had in the end become leaders of armies, rulers of kingdoms. Might it not be that Vasudeo Balvant had these examples before him and had studied them to emulate them?"

Mr. Nanabhai concluded by saying: "I am sure, Gentlemen of the Jury, you will return a verdict of guilty against Vasudeo Balvant on all the charges preferred against him."

After Mr. Nanabhai Haridas concluded his argument, Mr. M. C. Apte, Counsel for Vasudeo Balvant, began his speech for the defence. Mr. Apte was a legal luminary with a long list of legal triumphs to his credit. His fluent oratory sallied forth in measured words eloquent arguments in an endeavour to obtain the acquittal of Vasudeo Balvant. All present in the Court were greatly impressed by his forceful advocacy. But they wondered whether it would secure the acquittal of Vasudeo Balvant!

Watched by an admiring and sympathetic crowd on all sides, Mr. Apte told the jury that the case was one of the most important cases that had ever come up before a law court in the past and heard by an intelligent jury. Mr. Apte then said: "My client has already attained a notoriety in this land. I would, therefore, request you, Gentlemen of the Jury, to give your most careful attention to the merits of this case. I would further request you to leave out of your mind any impressions that you might have gathered from newspapers or people or the events that might have happened outside the Court until this

trial began. You would, please, forget for the moment what you have seen in the papers against Vasudeo Balvant or heard about him outside this Court!"

"As a responsible member of the Bar," Mr. Apte continued, "and a man of some position, I would also not try to make out a case which cannot be supported on the strength of the evidence before the Court. This might perhaps be against the wishes of Vasudeo Balvant. But I would not attempt anything which I cannot support from the papers!"

With this prologue to his sustained defence suitable to the times Mr. Apte proceeded to say: "Gentlemen of the Jury, you would remember that Vasudeo Balvant comes from a good and a respectable family and was a Government servant in the Military Finance Office drawing a salary of Rs. 60 a month. He was thus a man of position and a respectable member of the society."

Summing up the prosecution case against Vasudeo Balvant, Mr. Apte said: "It was alleged that Vasudeo attempted to wage war against the Queen and that people visited his house for learning the use of arms. The prosecution also alleged that he left his service to wage war, collected men and money for the purpose, committed dacoities and incited people against the British Government."

Mr. Apte asked the Jury: "What reasons would prompt a man of the position of Vasudeo Balvant to do these things? Even supposing the prosecution succeeded in proving its contention would you say that Vasudeo was in his right senses and proper state of mind when he thought of doing this? It is in evidence that he was suffering from fever when he wrote the autobiography. I would, therefore, ask you to take the autobiography, as indeed the diary of Vasudeo Balvant also, with considerable caution as the charges of offences against the State in this case are chiefly sustained by these documents. They in fact constitute the only material evidence about these charges in this case!"

Mr. Apte admitted that Vasudeo Balvant was not in a state of mind so as to be relegated to a lunatic asylum. "But he had obviously become," Mr. Apte said, "a monomaniac for a considerable time, haunting after one particular thing. He moved about in the same state of mind and body. Some extracts from the documents might be such as to come under the provisions of the Penal Code. But they were written in a strange state of mind. This fact should not be overlooked by you, Gentlemen of the Jury! Had Vasudeo Balvant been in a

sound state of mind, would he have kept such documents in his possession at the time of his arrest?

"Major Daniell has stated that when arrested, Vasudeo Balvant stared and looked as if he was certainly going to die. But when Vasudeo Balvant knew that he would be arrested at some time or other how would he have kept documents like these with him? In fact he intended very probably to hand them over to Government."

Dealing with the internal evidence, Mr. Apte submitted that it was highly improbable that Vasudeo Balvant would preserve the diary unless he had some legal motive in the acts mentioned in the diary. "He joined the dacoits with an intention to go with them up to a certain stage," continued Mr. Apte, "and then to give up the offenders to the police, and thus rid the Government of a source of public nuisance. His object in joining the dacoits was exactly what the document stated. It was to shield the innocent from violence which would have been committed but for his restraint on the dacoits. Unless with some such intention he would not keep the document with him at the time of his arrest. If his intention was otherwise he would not have kept the dacoits in full control. Is there any evidence of one single act of atrocity or violence committed by him in any of these dacoities? Is there any evidence of his having reaped personal benefit from the loot collected at different places?" Mr. Apte asked, and said: "If not, the motive of Vasudeo Balvant in joining the dacoits could not be otherwise than what is stated by me!"

Mr. Apte made a dramatic bid to demonstrate the worthlessness of the various prosecution witnesses by saying that it had been in evidence that several witnesses had been in police custody where they were told what to say in the Court. He added: "The brother-in-law of Vasudeo Balvant had been coerced by the police to make the statements he did. He has told on the face of the police here that he was forced by them to make false statements. His statements are contradicted by respective witnesses referred to by him. The natural presumption can be that similar coercion had been exercised by the police with regard to most of the witnesses!"

Mr. Apte pointed out that the passages about waging war against the British Government and collecting arms and money for the purpose did not appear at the beginning of the autobiography, but towards the middle and the end, and said: "But only detached passages were read out to you to show Vasudeo Balvant to be an extraordinary man and a villain."

Stressing the glaring lacuna in prosecution evidence, Mr. Apte said that the prosecution had painted Vasudeo Balvant either to be a person of extraordinary character or a confirmed villain. Upon either of the hypothesis, however, the prosecution has failed to prove the charges against Vasudeo Balvant. Mr. Apte asked the jury whether an extraordinary man, as Vasudeo Balvant was alleged to be, would have sought the assistance of mere schoolboys as helpmates "in the grand design of overthrowing the British Raj."

Referring to the antecedents of Vasudeo Balvant, Mr. Apte emphasized that he was employed in the Military Finance Office. "Is it possible," Mr. Apte asked, "that he knew not the strength of the British Raj? And is it possible that he was not aware that it would be stupid to attempt its overthrow? If he was, who else but a monomaniac would attempt the overthrow?"

As regards the alleged recruitment of the Rohillas by Vasudeo Balvant, Mr. Apte asked the jury whether it was possible that when they were already drawing Rs. 10 a month as stated by the Hyderabad witnesses, the Rohillas would go after another job. "The parties," Mr. Apte proceeded, "were not acquainted with each other. The alleged agreement is denied by Ismail-khan himself. If Vasudeo Balvant had really gone to engage the Rohillas he would have assumed a more important disguise than that of the brother of Rangopant, a mere toll clerk. Who would believe in the promises of such a man?" Mr. Apte queried, and asked the jury to discard the impossible allegations in that behalf.

The learned defence counsel next submitted that the proclamations offering rewards of Rs. 5,000 for the head of the Governor and Rs. 3,000 for that of the Collector and other rewards for lesser officials were more stupid and fantastic than the last pages of the autobiography, which no sensible man would think of issuing.

Mr. Apte concluded his address to the jury by stating that no sensible man could think of doing harm to the powerful British Raj and concluded: "I am confident, Gentlemen of the Jury, you will not now say that Vasudeo did commit the offences against the State with intention and as a sane man. I am sure you will not think so and will acquit him of all the charges. For if he is still convicted and is to suffer on those charges after all these arguments he would really be a very unfortunate man."

Mr. Apte finished his speech making a great impression about his ability at the bar on those present in the Court.



The Judge to Vasudeo Balvant: "You had said you wanted to make a statement in the Court. You can make it now."

Vasudeo Balvant: "I have now nothing to say in this Court."

The Judge asked the Jury: "It is now almost five o'clock. Would you like to hear me sum up the case now at this late hour or shall I do it tomorrow?"

The Foreman of the Jury: "It would be better if it is done tomorrow."

The Court then rose for the day.

The trial continued for the fifth and the last day on 7th November 1879. It being the last day of the trial, the people streamed in the Court since morning, and by ten o'clock the court room and its premises were densely thronged by an eager crowd awaiting the judgment in the trial. The Court was packed to suffocation, the number of visitors being larger than that on any of the previous days. They elbowed one another to secure at least standing accommodation in the congregation. Many in the crowd were wiping out the sweat on their foreheads in the exasperating heat. They still discussed with hard breath the possible outcome of the trial. Late-comers were halted by the police at a distant place and they in their hundreds swelled backwards along the banks of the confluencing rivers Mula and Mutha. As the day rolled on the crowd multiplied by hundreds, and the visitors climbed up the branches of trees and perched themselves on other elevated structures for a glimpse of the proceedings in the Court. Hundreds of special policemen were drafted to control the vast crowd and mounted troops stood by as a precautionary measure.

Mr. D'vine, the Court Bailiff, had to exert himself to the utmost to maintain order in the court room. The crowd in the Court was so thick that the Judge's summing up itself was once or twice interrupted by its boisterous whispers.

Vasudeo Balvant was brought to the Court in his *shigram* amidst loud whispers and a mild ovation from the crowd. He was strongly guarded on all sides by an armed escort. It was the last day of the trial and his fate was going to be decided that day. He was now the cynosure of all eyes. The citizens of a vanquished nation displayed their helplessness at his plight as they discussed the question whether fortune intended to crown the forehead of the nation's bravest and devoted son with the glory of martyrdom.

Summing up the case, the Judge, Mr. Newnham, said: "Gentlemen of the Jury, I am in complete agreement with the

learned Counsel for Vasudeo Balvant that you are to judge the merits of the prosecution case solely on the evidence adduced in the trial, and must not allow your minds to be influenced by anything you have heard outside or read in the newspapers, while giving your verdict. You have heard a great deal about the case for many months past. But all that is to be dismissed from your mind while you give your verdict.

"The first thing for you to find out," said Mr. Newnham, "is whether, in your opinion, upon the evidence before you, the accused Vasudeo Balvant is guilty under Section 121A of the Indian Penal Code, of conspiring to wage war against the Queen-Empress; secondly whether he is guilty under Section 122 of the Code, of collecting men, arms and ammunition or otherwise preparing to wage war; thirdly whether he is guilty under Section 124A of the Code, of attempting to excite disaffection against the British Government by spoken word or otherwise; fourthly whether he is guilty under Section 395 of the Code, of committing dacoities at Dhamari and other places; and lastly whether he is guilty under Section 400 of the Code, of belonging to a party of persons associated for the purpose of habitually committing dacoities."

"The facts of the case are," continued Mr. Newnham, "that the accused Vasudeo Balvant Phadke was employed in the Military Finance Office; he absconded from Poona. A proclamation was issued offering a reward for his arrest; he was then hunted down to the Nizam's Dominions and was eventually arrested. With him were found at the time of his arrest, the diary and autobiography, both written by him, giving the account of his proceedings against the State and regarding the collection of arms and looting villages like Dhamari, as also about his moving about with the Ramoshis and giving lectures and addresses to the peasants against the British Raj, and finally about his raising a rebellion against the British Government."

Mr. Newnham referred to the evidence of several witnesses, who corroborated the account of the proceedings given by Vasudeo Balvant in the documents both of which he read at length and remarked: "There is thus ample evidence about the intention of Vasudeo Balvant to raise a rebellion against the British Government, his having collected men and money by looting and having enlisted men for his future campaign, all of which prove his one intention to raise a rebellion!"

Commenting on the defence version about the movements and activities of Vasudeo Balvant, Mr. Newnham said: "It is almost impossible to discuss it with gravity. It was impossible

for me to hear it yesterday and still keep a grave countenance. It was full of absurd and ridiculous arguments ! ”

Mr. Newnham referred to the defence plea that Vasudeo Balvant wanted to help the Government and hand over the dacoits to the police, and asked : “ If this plea was a fact, why did Vasudeo Balvant not surrender himself to the police when he was hunted by them all over the Presidency ? It is admitted that Vasudeo Balvant did make seditious speeches to peasants and other people. But it is said that he did so in order to ascertain what amount of ignorance existed amongst ‘ our people ’. I would not comment on such utter trash.”

Rebutting the several defence allegations of inconsistency in the prosecution evidence, Mr. Newnham said : “ Vasudeo Balvant sought the assistance of the schoolboys because he possibly thought them not to be so dangerous and thought that if at all they told the facts to anybody nobody would readily believe in them. He kept the diary and other documents with him for noting down his future adventures, perhaps, also because they were handy, and probably because he was by then completely beset on all sides by the police and his enemies.”

Regarding the defence plea of Vasudeo Balvant being a monomaniac, Mr. Newnham said : “ The plea is not madness but monomania. If such pleas can stand as admissible even for a moment any murderer can escape the law with impunity ; monomania of any kind is no excuse unless it deranges a man’s mind so as to deprive him of all self-control and prevents him from realising the consequences of his acts.” As to the defence plea of the diary and the autobiography having been written during illness, Mr. Newnham said : “ Vasudeo was ill only during the last period. Until going to Gangapur at least he was not ill. The documents are perfectly clear as regards his acts and thoughts even till this time ! ”

Mr. Newnham said : “ The attempt of Vasudeo Balvant at overthrowing the British Government might be a contemptuous one ! Nevertheless it was still an attempt to overthrow the British Government. His attempt at treason might be negligible. Nevertheless it was still an attempt at sedition and inciting disaffection by spoken word. His attempt to do this had not the slightest possibility of success in it. But you must not forget that a good deal of mischief would have been done and serious consequences would have followed because of it.”

After discussing the evidence against the other accused Mr. Newnham concluded his address to the jury with the words : “ Gentlemen of the Jury, upon all this evidence you

are called upon to give your verdict against the accused. If, however, you have any reasonable doubt about the evidence you are of course to give the benefit of that doubt to the accused—Vasudeo Balvant Phadke."

The jury retired to its room for deliberation. Awaiting the return of the jury to the Court, thousands of spectators conjectured the jury's verdict in diverse ways of logic and emotion. Some of them thought: "Vasudeo Balvant will be sentenced to death with all the charges against him being held as proved." Most of them, however, averred: "He will be sentenced to suffer the more horrible transportation for life."

As the people pondered over the possible outcome of the trial in this way Mr. Newnham ordered Bala Kashinath Kunte to be tried before a Magistrate on a charge of perjury, and left the Court.

The people turned their eyes from the retiring Judge to the prisoners' dock and observed an old man advanced in age, speaking to Vasudeo Balvant. It was Balvantrao Phadke, meeting his rebellious son under the shadow of death to bid him farewell. He spoke to his son till the return of the jury and then walked off with a heavy heart and heavier steps out of the Court before the sentence was pronounced.

The jury returned to the Court after two hours of deliberation shortly after 2 p.m. An hour earlier, they had sent for a law book for reference. On being asked about their verdict the Foreman of the jury told the Judge that their verdict was unanimous and in pin-drop silence pronounced the jury's verdict of "guilty" against Vasudeo Balvant Phadke on all charges under Sections 121A, 122, 124A, 395 and 400 of the Indian Penal Code and against the other accused under the last two sections.

After noting down the verdict the Judge said to the jury: "Gentlemen of the Jury, you have done your duty without fear or favour, conscientiously as honest citizens in a rather trying case like this, and I thank you for the trouble you have taken."

Then turning to Vasudeo Balvant, the Judge asked him: "Do you wish to say anything before I pass the sentence?"

Vasudeo Balvant had not even a shadow of doubt about the judicial decision after the adverse verdict of the jury. He, therefore, said: "I have nothing to say!"

In a grave atmosphere full of expectancy the people turned their eager ears to hear the judgment. In passing the sentence the Judge, Mr. Newnham, said: "Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, you

have been convicted on overwhelming evidence of all the charges laid against you. The sentence I am about to pass upon you, I regret, is not the highest awarded in all cases owing to the leniency of the Penal Code. Your mischievous folly has done no harm whatever to the British Government and has done no good to anybody. You have brought ruin not only on yourself, but on hundreds of your fellow countrymen and have been the cause of the death of the sepoy at Palaspe, named Sabasing, as well as that of the poor misguided men, who, with Daulatrao, were shot down on Thisubai hill in arms against the authority! For the death of these people you are morally, though not legally, guilty. The sentence I, therefore, pass upon you is transportation for life!"

The rest of the accused, also, were sentenced to penal transportations ranging from ten to twenty-five years each.

"Transportation for life! *Kale Pani!!*"

"Not death, but Transportation!"

The transportation for life in those days was more horrible than death itself! The slow lingering death in the Andamans was more dreadful than the death, cruel yet immediate, on the gallows. The bombshell of this sentence, therefore, burst with a loud report in the precincts of the Court.

Sympathy and anxiety grappled with each other on a thousand grave faces as the people looked at the helpless patriot in the dock. But the defiant proud chest of Vasudeo Balvant remained undepressed, his head unbent and erect. His valour buoyed up. He displayed no surprise at the sentence of the Court. He was calm and collected. Fear dared not touch him. On hearing the sentence, watched by hundreds of his countrymen, Vasudeo Balvant said to his comrades with a smile: "Friends! We have been awarded these harsh sentences. But they will make us immortal in this land. Thousands pray to God for relief from the earthly lives. Without asking for it the Court has given it to us! Rejoice at it."

The people were stunned at this uncommon courage of Vasudeo Balvant in the face of a calamity paralysing the bravest of the brave. The Judge left the court room with equal surprise. The prisoners were quickly handcuffed. Vasudeo Balvant was also tied up with ropes. Armed European troops raised their voice to restore order in the Court. The people left their seats and swept along towards the dock. A stampede ensued. Under its weight the dock seemed to crack. Ceaseless efforts alone enabled the police to control the crowd after nearly three-quarters of an hour. Major Daniell first cleared the Court

of the spectators. Vasudeo Balvant was next removed from the dock and other prisoners subsequently.

Vasudeo Balvant was guarded by the troops on all sides. As he came out of the Court acknowledging the greetings of his countrymen the vast crowd was electrified with his *darshan*, and a thousand throats in the gathering simultaneously raised sky-rending shouts and slogans of "Vasudeo Balvant Phadke Ki Jay!" The shouts reverberated in the air with increasing pitch for a long time.

With firm dignified steps Vasudeo Balvant walked out of the main porch, and entered the special *shigram* awaiting him amidst deafening shouts and slogans! The *shigram* was surrounded by mounted police and troops under special officers and carried off Vasudeo Balvant to the jail. The people chased it for a time shouting the victorious slogan—"Vasudeo Balvant Phadke Ki Jay!" (Victory to Vasudeo Balvant Phadke!).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> A Report of the Trial of Wasudev Bulwant Phadkey published by the Daily Telegraph and Deccan Herald Press, Poona.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### BLOOD AND TEARS

THE vindictive British Government sentenced Vasudeo Balvant to penal transportation. But his countrymen never ceased to respect him. Ranade wrote a special article, although not under his name, in the *Dnyanaprakash* of Poona under the caption "A Mad Patriot", which eulogised the spirit of sacrifice displayed by Vasudeo Balvant in the nation's cause. Others said: "We curse Wassudev, the leader of dacoits, as being one of the causes of untold misery to hundreds of his fellow countrymen. Yet we cannot but hold in grateful recollection and honour the memory of Wassudev the patriot, who sacrificed himself and all his fine prospects in a mad and suicidal project. . . ."

Hostile comments on the rebel patriot emanated from the *Bombay Gazette*, and the *Times of India*. The *Bombay Gazette* said: "It was not Wassudeo Bulwunt and his gang of wretched Ramoshis that were to be feared, but if the gang should go on meeting with success and if the spirit of uncertainty should go on increasing a large portion of inhabitants of Western India might be induced and driven to lawless courses. And for Britain threatened with war on every hand . . . possibility existed of the movement becoming serious."<sup>1</sup>

The *Times of India* devoted two lengthy columns to the editorial which began with these words: "'Sivajee the Second' has not prospered. After a short and troubled reign he was ignominiously 'run in' by the police and Mr. Newnham has now sentenced him to transportation for life. Even the honour of martyrdom on the gallows is denied him." The editorial is full of satirical reflections on the fortunes of Vasudeo Balvant and the course of his revolt, and studied observations on the justification of a political revolt. It admitted that the rebel was actuated by patriotism although it described the patriotism as "morbid". It is written in the inimitable style of an anti-Indian Anglo-Indian paper. It concluded with a gratuitous advice to India which said: "The utter failure of his insane outbreak and perhaps, we may add, the fact that he has escaped

<sup>1</sup> The *Bombay Gazette*, November 11, 1879.

canonization at the hands of a hangman will render any repetition of his offence by any man of his class very unlikely."<sup>2</sup> Little did this editor know that a galaxy of Indian martyrs from Chapekars to Udhamsing was to follow Vasudeo Balvant to the gallows in the same sacred cause till it was triumphant!

In a preface to a booklet on the revolt published by a European concern in 1880 appear the following comments: ". . . . The ensuing pages tell us of a man, who chafing under a sense of the wrongs, real or imaginary, of himself and his fellow countrymen, gave up what appears to have been a promising career in the Government employment, and began to wander about the country, lecturing to the people and endeavouring to persuade them to risé and join him in an effort to overthrow the British Government. He succeeded in getting only a handful of desperate men to his cause. . . . Success is the only justification of rebellion. . . . William Wallace, Robert Bruce and Oliver Cromwell would not have been entitled to the praise of posterity which is now accorded them, had they not been successful in their respective undertakings. . . . It is to be hoped that his (Vasudeo Balvant's) rapid downfall will be a warning to (all)."<sup>3</sup>

And so the failure of Vasudeo Balvant made him unpraiseworthy for the race of the rulers and not any rational objection to his rising! If so, he won applause of his countrymen for the very reason that the revolt was not objectionable from any moral viewpoint, but was organised with high patriotic idealism.

While the Anglo-Indian press poured its invective on the dignified head of Vasudeo Balvant the Indian nationalist press was all praise for his sterling patriotism. It had, however, to couch its praise under expression of disapproval of his ways to avoid the clutches of law. Its admiration for Vasudeo Balvant can be discerned in the following comments:

The *Shivaji* said: ". . . The intentions of Wasudev were praiseworthy, but he did not go the right way to work (them). For the good of his countrymen he gave up a comfortable situation, abandoned a young wife and sacrificed his own happiness. He did not commit dacoities to amass wealth. We cannot help praising him for his disinterestedness and patriotism. . . . In these days we very much feel the need of individuals possessing his disinterestedness and self-denial. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The *Times of India*, November 10, 1879.

<sup>3</sup> A *Report of the Trial of Wasudev Bulwant Phadkey*, published by the *Daily Telegraph and Deccan Herald Press*, Poona.

<sup>4</sup> The *Shivaji*, November 21, 1879.



The *Deccan Star* wrote: "In the eyes of his countrymen, Wasudev Balvant Phadke did not commit any wrong. . . . All true Englishmen must sympathise with him. . . . Besides, our rulers are Christians who are commanded by their religion to love their neighbours as themselves. Wasudev, though a Brahmin, showed a truly Christian spirit when he tried to relieve the misery of his countrymen. Those who censure Wasudev for pursuing the course which he did are simply dissemblers. When war was raging between Great Britain and her American colonies one Dean Tucker wrote a pamphlet to show that the separation of the American colonies from their mother country would be no loss to the latter, but a clear gain to her. This opinion did not find favour at the time. But we know from history that his opinion was right. Wasudev deserves the highest praise not only from all natives, but even from Englishmen who wish for the prosperity of Her Majesty's Eastern Empire. By sacrificing himself he has averted a danger which sooner or later must follow intolerable oppression. We consider him as the harbinger of a bright future for India."<sup>5</sup>

The *Bodha Sudhakar* said: ". . . Some journals of Bombay have heaped all kinds of opprobrious epithets on Wasudev. But his autobiography shows that he possessed some sterling qualities. He must be classed with some of the best benefactors of mankind. . . . His intentions were good, but the means by which he hoped to carry out his ideas were utterly unsuited to the times. We are certain that those who esteem or applaud Washington will do the same in case of Wasudev; but the natives of India have lost all ideas of patriotism, and hence there is no one to appreciate him. Washington pursued a policy which was perfectly understood by all his countrymen; but the plans of Wasudev were utterly unintelligible to his followers. The opinions which Wasudev has expressed with reference to the oppressiveness of the British rulers are true to a certain extent, and it would be well if our governors were to profit by them. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

The following beautiful and memorable editorial appeared in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta, founded and edited by the late Mr. Shishir Kumar Ghosh: "Wassudeo Bulwunt Phadke possesses many of the traits of those high-souled men who are now and then sent in this world for the accomplishment of great purposes! He was an angel tempted by the devil and seduced. His heart was sound; but his reason led him astray.

<sup>5</sup> The *Deccan Star*, November 23, 1879.

<sup>6</sup> The *Bodha Sudhakar*, December 3, 1879.

Yet the noble feelings of a Washington, a Tell and a Garibaldi animated his breast, and if he is not appreciated in this country where patriotism is unknown, he will be better appreciated in England and other Western countries. As a dacoit his crime must be detested. Yet it is but due to him that his is a noble soul! His heart overflowed with love for India and what Indian can regard such a heart with indifference? Even as a dacoit he had a horror of looting the property of females, and he never looted property for his selfish ends. He is the most unselfish of men and his diary breathes a spirit of unselfishness which is truly divine. Whatever he had, he was willing to offer for his country, even his life. The very idea of establishing a *Republic* shows the unselfish nature of his mind. He had no intention to establish a raj of his own. Eminently pious, he always fervently prayed to God for the regeneration of his country. Forget for a moment that Phadke led bands of dacoits and sought the subversion of British Government and then he stands before you as a being who is as superior to the common herd of humanity as the Himalayas to the Satpoora Range." <sup>7</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant was to have left Poona for Thana on his way to the Andamans on 12th November 1879. The news was kept a closely-guarded secret. But it leaked out and an hour before the train by which he travelled left for Thana, the station platform at Poona and all the roads approaching it were crowded with thousands of people. The patriotism and stormy career of Vasudeo Balvant had not only endeared himself to his countrymen, but had also created a charm in his name for the Europeans. And they also had gone to the station to see him, accompanied by several European ladies.

The arrival of Vasudeo Balvant at the station under a strong police and military guard was a signal for loud shouts from the people who hailed victory to his name. As the cheering grew intense the European ladies in the crowd on the platform struggled hard to catch a glimpse of the Indian rebel. One of them, afterwards identified as Mrs. Higgins by a member of the Governor's Executive Council, rushed forth and presented Vasudeo Balvant with a massive nosegay and garland of fresh flowers. Vasudeo Balvant accepted them with thanks. He then entrained at Poona for the last time in a reserved compartment, and the train steamed off amidst shouts of "Vasudeo Balvant Phadke Ki Jay!" raised by the people.

Vasudeo Balvant was escorted by an armed guard under a

<sup>7</sup> The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, November 13, 1879.

European officer called Studdert. The news of his journey to Thana had preceded him and reached all stations on the way. People consequently had assembled in large numbers at all the stations to greet him. He also spoke a few words to some of them, leaning out of the carriage window although he was handcuffed.

The Governor and his Councillors deprecated the "political demonstration", to use their expression, at Poona and the liberty allowed to Vasudeo Balvant at wayside stations. They particularly ordered an enquiry as to why the prisoner was allowed to speak to two Hindus and a Parsee gentleman at Kalyan. The Acting Chief Secretary to Bombay Government exclaimed: "The whole business connected with Vasudeo's removal from Poona to Thana appears to have been grossly mismanaged."<sup>8</sup>

The armed guard under the European officer detrained at Thana along with Vasudeo Balvant. A large crowd of the citizens of Thana tried to go to the station platform, but it was held up by the police outside the station. The people had also lined up the main road leading to the Thana jail from end to end, and a mighty shout of welcome rose from them as Vasudeo Balvant drove past to the jail in a closed carriage. He arrived in Thana jail on 12th November 1879,<sup>9</sup> and was lodged in the Transportation Yard on the right side of the jail reserved for the transportees.

The accounts of the triumphant journey of Vasudeo Balvant to Thana angered the Anglo-Indian press and one of its spokesmen said: "... At all the stations he was allowed to converse with anyone, leaning out of the railway carriage as though he was an honoured guest of the Government instead of a convict on his way to penal servitude. Government have acted wisely in not making a martyr of the man, and he should be removed from the country so quietly as to attract no attention so that he should be forgotten as speedily as possible." This wicked wish of the Anglo-Indians, however, proved a miserable failure. For since the day of Vasudeo Balvant's transportation his name has been in India a symbol of challenge to the British Government and a name of profound love and reverence!

All the transportees were first collected in the Thana jail *en route* to the Andamans. Their march to the Andamans

<sup>8</sup> Letter to the Acting Under-Secretary, dated 14th November 1879, Bombay Government Records.

<sup>9</sup> Register showing the Description of Convicted Prisoners confined in the Tanna Jail during the year 1879.

was called a *chalan*. And because of the desperate temper of the convicts in the *chalan* the arrival of a *chalan* in the jail was an ordeal for the jail staff. One such *chalan* had been ready within a week after Vasudeo Balvant's arrival in the jail at Thana and it was to leave for the Andamans on 18th November 1879.

The entire Government circle at the top was solely pre-occupied with the arrangement to be made for the immediate deportation of Vasudeo Balvant to the Andamans. Alarmed at the popular demonstration of love and reverence for him at Poona and other places, J. R. Naylor who was now Acting Secretary to the Government, issued strict and detailed instructions to his subordinates regarding the arrangements to be made for his deportation. According to these instructions Vasudeo Balvant was not to be transported from Thana on 18th November with the main *chalan*, but was to be secretly sent on the evening of 17th November under a select and efficient guard up to Jalgaon in a special second-class reserved compartment. He was to be lodged in the sub-jail near the Jalgaon station until the 18th November and was then to continue the journey by the mail train along with the *chalan* arriving there on the 18th November. If the train did not stop at Jalgaon the prisoner was to detrain at Bhusaval instead, and then to proceed further as indicated above.

No intimation about the deportation was to be given to Vasudeo Balvant until he was on his way to the railway station. The necessary tickets were to be purchased beforehand, and he was to reach the station only a few minutes before the train arrived at Thana. The guards were also to be merely asked on the morning of 16th or 17th November to be prepared for duty on 17th November, and the purpose and destination was not to be disclosed to them.

Vasudeo Balvant was not to be allowed to speak to any person on his way to the station or while travelling. Conversation with persons at all stations where the train stopped was not to be permitted.

The Jail Superintendent, Smith, was specifically and distinctly warned that the orders were strictly confidential, that they were to be kept secret, that "Government will hold him responsible should it be known beforehand" that Vasudeo Balvant was to leave Thana on 17th November "and that the orders were to be fully carried out."

Smith, however, suggested that as Jalgaon was only a small place it would be advisable to take Vasudeo Balvant right up

to Allahabad at once. He further said that he would need a European police officer to accompany the prisoner at night on 17th November. Both of his suggestions were accepted.

But the day after his arrival in the Thana jail, Vasudeo Balvant asked the Superintendent of the jail to call for a copy of the findings of the Sessions Judge as he intended to appeal to the High Court of Bombay against his conviction. This the Superintendent did on 14th November 1879.

The orders of the Acting Chief Secretary to Government for the removal of Vasudeo Balvant to the Andamans were in contravention of the Government rule that no prisoner was to be deported until his appeal was decided. Ashburner, in his anxiety to deport Vasudeo Balvant to the Andamans at once, said: "He (Vasudeo Balvant) can as well appeal from the Andamans as from Thana," and was prepared to ignore the rule framed by his own Government as in his opinion the rule could be revoked by the Government which framed it, and also because he thought that the popular feelings of resentment and excitement over the deportation would subside immediately on removal of Vasudeo Balvant to the Andamans.

But Ashburner's colleague, Ravencraft, was not in favour of any such violation of the rules. He thought that the deportation need not be hastened lest an impression should go round that Government took an extraordinary action in case of a prisoner, whom he considered to be "imbecile and contemptible", and dissented from Ashburner's proposal. Ashburner and the Acting Chief Secretary had ultimately to yield. The transportation of Vasudeo Balvant was stayed for the time being.

On receipt of the papers Vasudeo Balvant drafted, in the first week of December 1879, a lengthy petition in Marathi addressed to the Bombay High Court. In this petition he prayed that the records and the papers of his case might be called for, and his conviction and sentence reversed or the latter reduced. The petition was received by the High Court on 7th December 1879.

The appeal came up for hearing on 18th December 1879 before Mr. Justice Pinhe and Mr. Justice Melville at the Bombay High Court. The High Court was then only recently shifted to its present building from the Admiralty House on the Apollo Street.<sup>10</sup> Mr. M. C. Apte appeared for Vasudeo Balvant, submitting to the High Court a supplementary petition, probably one as a legal counsel would have liked to draft.

<sup>10</sup> Marble tablets in the walls of the Admiralty House and the High Court buildings in Bombay.

Arguing the appeal, Mr. Apte said : ". . . Had it been open to me to get into the facts, I would have been able to show almost conclusively that my client had neither the capacity nor the pluck to do all the fabulously wild things he is charged with, and that his waging war against the Queen cannot be considered in any other light. When the political charges are once expunged there remain only the ordinary charges of dacoity, and Vasudeo Balvant can be adequately punished with imprisonment for a term of a few years. But the law denies me the privilege of going into the facts. I am thus compelled to find errors of law and to endeavour to persuade your Lordships to mitigate the sentence ! "

Mr. Apte referred to the charge of the Sessions Judge to the jury and said : " The error of law was that the Judge expressed in unmistakable language the opinion that Vasudeo was guilty. This in accordance with certain decisions of the Bengal High Court was an error in law." Mr. Apte cited the relevant decisions of the Bengal High Court and said : " The Sessions Judge was also in error in styling the defence as absurd and ludicrous and in introducing matters not in evidence in charging the jury." Mr. Apte also pleaded that the sentence passed by the Sessions Judge was too severe and should be reversed or reduced."

Mr. Justice Pinhe : " When I was a Sessions Judge I used to express to the jury my opinion as to the prisoner's guilt, and it is the practice of many judges, amongst them the present Chief Justice of England, to do so. There is no law which renders such practice illegal."

Disposing of the petition, Mr. Justice Pinhe observed : " We have patiently read through the unusually long petition in vernacular sent by the prisoner in jail, and have heard what the prisoner's counsel had to say and urge on his client's behalf. We see no reason whatever to induce ourselves to send for the records and proceedings in the case. I have already expressed my opinion on the point of law raised by Mr. Apte who has not pressed any other legal question upon the Court's attention. This being a jury case, we are, of course, precluded from entering into questions of fact. With regard to the mitigation of the sentence, we cannot forget, what is indeed a matter of history, that this man's doings have led to disastrous results. A large number of ignorant Ramoshees, Koonbeys and even agriculturists of other castes, were induced to band together for the purpose of plunder, and some of them have been sentenced

for their offences to long terms of imprisonment, others to transportation for life and others again to capital punishment. The petitioner might not be legally answerable for these results, but there can be no doubt that he is so morally. We, therefore, see no reason to send for the proceedings with a view to mitigating the sentence and, therefore, reject the petition."

After the appeal of Vasudeo Balvant was dismissed by the High Court his transportation to the Andamans any time became a certainty. For the Governor's Councillors like Ashburner were itching to send him off as soon as possible.

The way to deport Vasudeo Balvant to the Andamans was now clear. But the Andamans held the prisoners of the war of 1857. The number of prisoners there was quite large and the rules admitted of the facility of being released on the islands in case of long-term prisoners after a certain period. The Government was not sure what further trouble Vasudeo Balvant would stir up in the Andamans with the help of the prisoners, availing himself of such facilities. The matter was, therefore, discussed at a special meeting of the Governor's Executive Council on 22nd December. Sir Richard Temple and his Councillors finally decided against sending Vasudeo Balvant to the Andamans, and the Acting Chief Secretary, Naylor, with one stroke of his pen, or rather pencil,<sup>11</sup> changed his place of transportation from the islands of Andamans to the fort of Aden, which was more secure and fortified, less extensive, where the number of prisoners was quite small, and which was under the direct jurisdiction of the Bombay Government. "Vasudeo to go to Aden, not to the Andamans," said Naylor and added: "No notice to be given beforehand but the Inspector General of Prisons to be warned confidentially; (the prisoner) to be sent by P. and O. with European Police Officer."

And in doing this the Government had shown no mercy to Vasudeo Balvant. For the climate of Aden was poorer compared to that of the Andamans.

The peninsular Aden is an irregular oval, fifteen miles in circumference with a width of three to five miles at places. It consists of a huge crater walled round by precipices, the highest peak being 1,775 feet above sea-level.<sup>12</sup>

The climate of Aden with a temperature ranging from 75 degrees in January to 98 degrees in June and a meagre rainfall

<sup>11</sup> Naylor's note in pencil, dated 22nd December 1879, Bombay Government records.

<sup>12</sup> *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. V, pp. 10-11.

impairs the faculties of constant residents and undermines their constitution.<sup>13</sup>

If free citizens and inhabitants of the peninsula lost their health so surely the fate of prisoners on the peninsula can easily be guessed. The object of the British Government in selecting Aden as the place of imprisonment for Vasudeo Balvant would be quite clear from these climatic conditions of Aden.

The strategic importance of Aden had necessitated in those days the permanent stationing of three or four companies of artillery, three or four battalions of the British army and a few companies of sappers and miners on the peninsula. The prisoners in the fort of Aden seldom exceeded a score or two in 1880.

It was now necessary for the Government to revise the plan for the transportation of Vasudeo Balvant to the Andamans. Naylor, therefore, wrote a note, on 23rd December, to the Inspector General of Prisons Dr. Cruickshank, and informed him that Vasudeo Balvant was to be brought away from the Thana jail to Bombay by a train timed to arrive a short time before the P. and O. steamer left Mazgaon, and was to be taken straight on board the steamer. Nobody except the Superintendent of the jail was to know the orders. Frank Souter, the Commissioner of Police, was to provide a European officer to accompany Vasudeo Balvant to Aden by the next mail or the mail after. Naylor also asked Souter to take the necessary steps, treating the arrangement throughout as strictly confidential, "Vasudeo Balvant himself not being informed about the departure till the moment arrives for him to leave Thana."

Dr. Cruickshank wrote back to Naylor, on 25th December 1879, acknowledging his letter regarding "Bulwant Wasudev Phutke" and informed him that the next P. and O. steamer would not start till Saturday the 3rd January 1880, when his orders would be carried out.

Accordingly a carriage was kept waiting for Vasudeo Balvant at 6 a.m. on 3rd January 1880, at the Byculla railway station. The first train in the morning was selected to take him from Thana to Byculla so that he would be taken out of the jail and through the city of Thana before the people woke up, and would be brought to Byculla before there was any stir at the stations. Souter was asked to secure the passage to Aden and provide a European officer to accompany Vasudeo Balvant to Aden.

<sup>13</sup> Capt. F. M. Hunter, *An Account of the British Settlement of Aden in Arabia*, p. 3.



On Saturday, 3rd January 1880, as the wintry cold breezes of early January blew over the grey old walls of the Thana jail Vasudeo Balvant was all of a sudden asked to pack up and was secretly taken out of his cell by the Jail Superintendent, Smith, in the early morning while it was still dark and quiet. No one except the guard knew of the removal—"not even the Brahmin clerks in the jail". Nobody in Thana itself knew it either. He was taken to the railway station in a closed *shigram* driving fast to its destination. It was a short time before 5 a.m. when the first train left Thana. The city was then enjoying its early morning slumber and peace. The railway police between Thana and Byculla were warned to keep the stations free from crowds and to prevent any demonstration.<sup>14</sup> The Superintendent of Police, G.I.P. Railway (now Central Railway), travelled by the train to ensure that every precaution was in fact taken.

Hardly one or two passengers were consequently present at any of the stations, and no one knew that Vasudeo Balvant was travelling with Superintendent Smith by that train. At Byculla the prisoner with the warrant addressed to the gaoler at Aden was handed over to Inspector McDermott of the Bombay police, specially deputed by the Commissioner of Police to escort the prisoner to Aden. Two police sepoy were also sent to help the Inspector with his charge. Vasudeo Balvant was then straightway taken to Mazgaon on board the outgoing P. & O. mail steamer s.s. *Teheran*, never to land back in India, dead or alive!

The s.s. *Teheran* sailed on for Aden at 2.30 p.m. on 3rd January 1880,<sup>15</sup> and the ocean fast expanded between Vasudeo Balvant and his motherland. The agony of his soul at the separation from his motherland must have been intense and unbearable. The steamer tossed on and on almost for six long days and six long nights and on 9th January,<sup>16</sup> it delivered Vasudeo Balvant to the peninsular authorities at Aden at 11.50 a.m.<sup>15</sup> and steamed off on its further journey to London.<sup>16</sup>

The departure of Vasudeo Balvant for Aden was kept so secret that the Government Resolution directed the Financial Department to sanction confidentially the payment of the sum of Rs. 545 to the P. & O. Steam Navigation Company through the Commissioner of Police, without stating any particulars of

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Inspector General of Prisons to Government of Bombay, dated 6th January 1880, Bombay Government records.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from the Public Relations Executive, P. & O. Steam Navigation Company, dated 11th August 1958.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from the Government of Aden, dated 13th September 1947.

the purpose for which the charges were incurred. And this was also done under a confidential communication.

The huge gates of the prison with the Lord of Death dancing his wicked measure on their top were flung open, and the cruel guards led Vasudeo Balvant inside the jail. And there he was confined in a solitary cell after the formalities of registration of his arrival etc. were over.

From that day onwards Vasudeo Balvant began to pay the price of his burning patriotism with his flesh and blood. The story of his woes and heart-breaking sufferings in the Aden jail would never be fully known to the world. But the plight of a great patriot thirty-one years afterwards can afford a glimpse of the ordeal. For passage of time, if at all, mitigates the severity of the tribulations in the jail and their arduous and exacting nature in 1911 can give us some idea of their ferocity in 1880. The said patriot writes that the patriots were yoked to the oil-mill for months. "Even skilled expert coolies shed tears within twenty turns at the oil-mill, the iron shaft of which was terribly heavy when the coconut kernel was pressed into its feeder. With a loin cloth they worked at the mill (the whole day) and their breath became heavy by turning round and round the oil-mill. . . . The body continuously ached with pain. . . . Hardly had they any sleep at night and when the day dawned the oil-mill would again stare them in the face. Once while turning the oil-mill, panting for breath, I felt I was fainting. The stomach stiffened and I sank down, reclining against the wall. I closed my eyes and fell into a stupor. It was a completely vacant state of mind. I regained consciousness only after a while. My mind asked me: 'why don't you finish that last task? End all your trouble tonight with the piece of the rope which served hundreds of Port Blair prisoners as the bridge to the other world?'"<sup>17</sup>

An official sketch of the Aden jail in 1880 found in the archives of the Government of Bombay features a structure of oil-mill and official reports also mention a grain-grinding shed in the jail. This confirms the conclusion that Vasudeo Balvant too was subjected to equally savage, if not more cruel, hard labour in the jail at Aden.

Savarkar tells us that one of the few occasions on which he felt a great fascination for suicide was the one when he was shut up in close confinement on the boat near Aden in the severe heat which was unbearable and exasperating. If a halt

<sup>17</sup> Swatantryaveer Savarkar, *My Transportation* (Marathi), pp. 99-100, 105 & 130.

of a short duration at Aden exasperated a prisoner to this extent the plight of Vasudeo Balvant consigned to the fort of Aden for life can easily be comprehended.

Despite the tribulations in the jail, Vasudeo Balvant's spirit remained defiant and undaunted. Within two months of his coming to Aden he did not hesitate to challenge the superior might of the jail authorities, and refused to drink water supplied through skins as it was against the tenets of his religion to do so. The authorities had ultimately to give in and redress his grievance.

After about six months of further suffering Vasudeo Balvant became reluctant to suffer in silence, and commenced planning his escape from the jail. In this task he was helped by a companion who, however, remained unknown. Vasudeo Balvant's intention to escape somehow became known to the Superintendent of the jail, Surgeon Major Dr. E. Colson, through private information. Dr. Colson forthwith transferred Vasudeo Balvant to a cell close to the Superintendent's office, posted the night guards over the cell and appointed an additional special guard to keep a watch over him. The guards were instructed to keep awake the whole night and watch the prisoner. As a further precaution Dr. Colson also fettered Vasudeo Balvant. The daring escape of Vasudeo Balvant from the jail in spite of the advance information to the Superintendent and these extraordinary precautions naturally evokes greater admiration. The greater the difficulties, greater is the bravery displayed by great men in overcoming them.

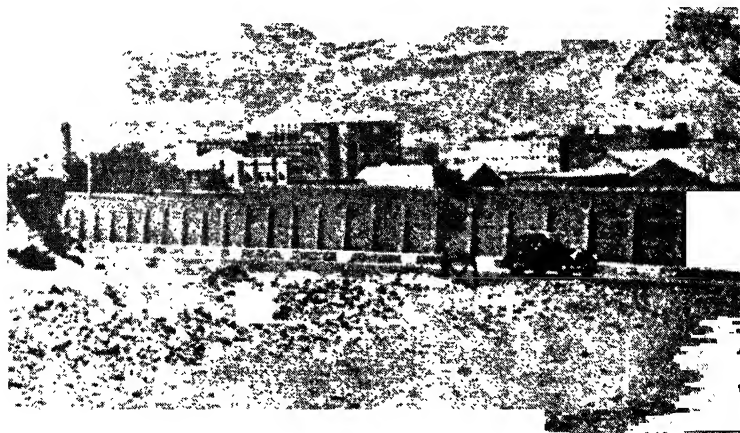
It appears that the jail authorities and guards were very vigilant about Vasudeo Balvant for the first few months. But they felt reassured when the prisoner did not attempt to escape during the period, and turned slack.

Towards the beginning of October 1880, Vasudeo Balvant gave finishing touches to his plan of escape. The 12th of October fell on Tuesday. At the end of the usual hard and exacting labour of the day Vasudeo Balvant was locked up in his cell in heavy fetters with his body fatigued beyond description. Two sentries stood guard outside the cell. The nocturnal hours rolled on, but due to excitement Vasudeo Balvant could not sleep. The stillness of the night was intermittently broken by the shout of the guards : "All well !" or as they pronounced it : "All Bell !" The military gongs also began to strike the hours.

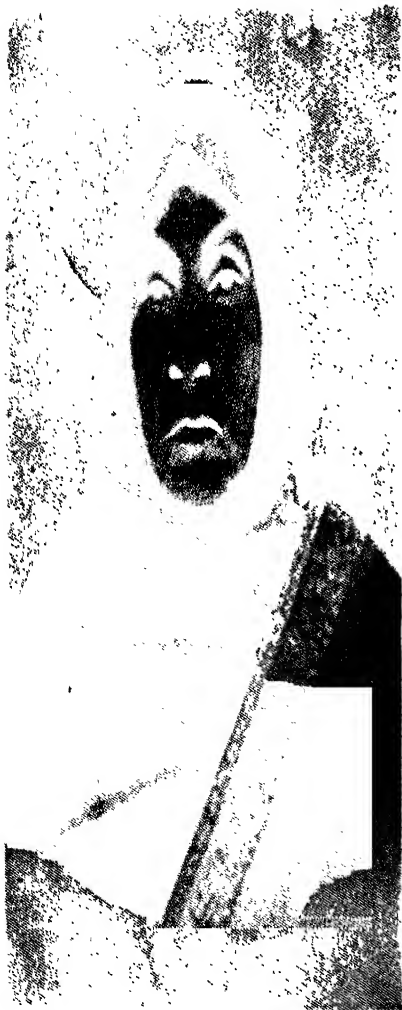
When it was pitchy dark Vasudeo Balvant embarked on his task. He looked out and perceived the armed guards Shaikh



Port of Aden



Place of Transportation  
( Aden Jail )



Gopikabai Phadke



Memorial Pillar at Shirdhon

Samsoodin Shaikh Abdul Wahid and Shaikh Abdul Rahaman Shaikh Nabhee Baksh fast asleep about three yards away from the cell. Shaikh Suggun whose shift commenced at 3 a.m. also lay close to them fast asleep. Vasudeo Balvant commenced removing his fetters. He went to the door of his cell and with his strong arms lifted the doors off their hinges.<sup>18</sup> Then placing his fetters one by one on the hinges, he pulled them wide apart in the opposite direction with all his might in dead earnest. Within a moment the fetters lost their shape and fastenings. He tugged and strained at them with force, and they dropped down on the ground in broken pieces. Ah! He was at last free in his cell!

Vasudeo Balvant quickly took off his jail uniform and put on the other clothes which were secretly obtained by him beforehand from his companion. He looked outside. The sinking moon was not visible, being concealed by the high hillocks which towered over the ravine in which the jail was situated.<sup>19</sup> He lifted up the doors and stepping over the recumbent bodies of the sleeping guards outside, ran fast into the jail court yard with the doors in his hands, under cover of darkness. There were several heaps of stones lying between him and the guards.<sup>19</sup> Half the enclosure was easily crossed by him behind the heaps. Just then he heard Shaikh Suggun calling out to a prisoner Abdul Rahim, who was entrusted with the work of lighting the jail lamp, to light the lamp as the moon was now behind the hills. There was also a talk between them about an old prisoner named Budun Khan. Vasudeo Balvant, therefore, hurried into the grain-grinding shed nearby and waited there for about an hour until the guard and the prisoner again went to sleep. Then he hastened out of the shed to the jail wall without stirring anybody.

There he felt obstructed for a while. But without faltering he placed the doors against the wall and scaled half the wall at a stretch. Then he paused for catching breath and with redoubled vigour climbed up the remaining wall. For once he looked back in joy at the prison which held him and then jumped down the jail wall.

Aden is unlike India, being isolated and having immediate connection with Arabia, surrounded by a harbour with numerous foreign craft. The traffic through the Main Gate and

<sup>18</sup> " . . . He unhinged the doors of his cell and carried them up to the jail walls over which he escaped."—*The Times of India*, October 28, 1880.

<sup>19</sup> Captain Sealy's Judgment in Criminal Case No. 427 against the two jail guards.

the Barrier Gate in the early morning is considerable, and the confusion is increased by the number of camels that pass and repass through the Gates. Vasudeo Balvant thought of taking advantage of the confusion and slip out of the hands of his captors.

It was now 3 a.m. Vasudeo Balvant walked on and reached the Main Gate of the military barracks. Here one road was leading out of the Crater to the Steamer Point on the western coast of Aden, and another stretched through the desert towards the district of Lahej inhabited by the Arab tribes on the north. He found a corporal standing at the Gate which was to open at sunrise. So he waited patiently in the crowd beside the gate. After waiting for a while, however, he became impatient. Just then it occurred to him that if he turned back there was at a distance a tunnel near the Isthmus, to get out to Lahej. He, therefore, retraced his track and passed through the tunnel to the other side. He soon by-passed the Barrier Gate and proceeded in the direction of Lahej, inhaling the breeze of liberty after many months of incarceration. He walked on and on and after some time pressed his feet at a sharper pace and began to run. He ran at top speed without a break for twelve long miles of his epic flight on the way to the Interior.

The guards over his cell woke up in the morning to find the cell open and observed the doors reclining against the jail wall. They immediately realised the disaster that had overtaken them.

The news of the spectacular escape of Vasudeo Balvant soon reached the jail officials. The alarm bell of the jail rang its frightening chimes. The search machine was set in motion to recapture the prisoner and mounted *swars* started on the mission in different directions.

The Superintendent of the jail, Dr. Colson, also sent a note to Mr. L. P. Walsh, Assistant Political Resident, in charge of Police at Aden, shortly after 6 a.m. intimating him about the escape and requesting him to take all necessary steps for the recapture of the prisoner. The Assistant Resident immediately telegraphed the news to the Point, and all the available members of the force under his charge were at once despatched in search of the fugitive.

Mr. Walsh visited the 14th Native Infantry Lines, and met the Infantry guards who were on duty in the jail the previous night; but was unable to elicit from them information of any moment.

The police under Inspector Sullivan visited every empty house and ravine in the north-west and the Munsoori Hill.

There they stumbled against the *langot* of the prisoner and thought that he had gone towards the Isthmus. They then started on an elaborate and vigilant search in that direction.

The water police also were alerted and the native ships lying on the Maalla Bunder were boarded and searched by them. Similar search was also carried out by them at the Point.

With the special sanction of Brigadier General A. E. Lock, Political Resident at Aden, a reward of Rs. 200 was announced for the apprehension of Vasudeo Balvant and tomtomed throughout the settlement, which attracted over two hundred Somalis and Arabs to join the pursuit. The pursuit was then pressed with great vigour.

Vasudeo Balvant stopped his run as the day advanced. He was traversing an unfrequented country after a miraculous escape. He was hunted down by pursuers who would not hesitate to shoot him at sight if they were unable to capture him. He was completely exhausted, craved for rest and therefore halted for some time.

The lure of the reward had also stirred the inhabitants of Shaikh Usman. Ten hours after his escape, at 1 p.m., Vasudeo Balvant scented the mounted pursuers. Soon they were in his sight. They raised an alarm and it alerted the Arab wayfarers. His attire aroused their suspicion. Four of them Hasan Abdulla, Salim Nuleb, Fudul *bin* Salim and Salim Fudul impeded his march and questioned him. Vasudeo Balvant tried to explain to them his lot in broken Urdu. But the Arabs could not make any head or tail out of it. The surging shadow of rearrest spread over him. He was soon overtaken by the horsemen on his chase at a place called Bir Obed near Lahej, twelve miles from Aden. Vasudeo Balvant had a scuffle with his captors, but was overpowered and rearrested by them, and brought back to the Aden jail in the midst of several policemen and soldiers, accompanied by Inspector Sullivan and the Assistant Resident Mr. Walsh who had hastened to the spot on receipt of the news!

Considerable excitement prevailed in Aden that day and the people, who knew that Vasudeo Balvant was lodged in the jail and had escaped, gathered in large numbers on the way to see him. When after his short-lived liberty he was brought back to Aden about 3 p.m. they loudly shouted: "Maharaj has come!" With cheerless eyes Vasudeo Balvant moved past the crowd, and entered the jail through the jail gates, never to come out alive again.

Vasudeo Balvant was now confined in another solitary cell



with heavier fetters riveted on his legs. He was guarded by new select guards. The vengeance of the Government on account of his escape vied with its indignation at his escape and a member of the Governor's Executive Council ordered that Vasudeo Balvant should be punished with flogging and by reduced diet. The rigorous hard labour exacted from him thereafter rendered him quite helpless.

The *post mortem* on the escape also commenced at Aden. The two guards Shaikh Samsoodin and Abdul Rahaman were prosecuted for negligence of duty before Captain Sealy, First Class Magistrate at Aden, on 15th October 1880 in Criminal Case No. 427 in which Vasudeo Balvant figured as witness No. 3 for the prosecution. The guards were found guilty and sentenced to two months' imprisonment with a fine of Rs. 100 each, in default to two months' further imprisonment. Needless to say, the guards were dismissed from service.

The ultimate objective of Vasudeo Balvant after his escape is evident from the following observation of the Superintendent of the jail. He said: (This) important prisoner effected his escape with the greatest ease, and had there been some organised plot, would now have been on his way to Bombay." <sup>20</sup> Details of unsuccessful plots seldom come to light. But the remark hints at what was possible.

Major G. R. Goodfellow, in his capacity as the Acting Political Resident at Aden, submitted a detailed report about the escape to the Governor-in-Council soon after the escape and recapture of Vasudeo Balvant.

For the next two years and a quarter Vasudeo Balvant had to face savage tribulations. Even his stout physique, which had withstood the manifold exertions of a rebel's life in the wilds of the Sahyadris, succumbed to the atrocious exaction of overwork and close solitary confinement within the short period and tuberculosis sprang upon him towards the middle of 1881.

As his body gradually sank down with consumption, in July 1881, he was given extras in the shape of milk and potatoes, meat being precluded as he was a vegetarian. The prison officials were self-complacent and said that his health was "as fairly well as could be expected in a prisoner in solitary confinement." They never cared to mitigate the severity of his jail life.

In August 1882, the Superintendent, Dr. Colson, went on leave and Dr. Robb was appointed in his place. Vasudeo

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Colson's letter No. 573 of 1880 to the Inspector General of Prisons, Poona, Bombay Government records.

Balvant requested Dr. Robb to stop half the extras on the plea that he had no strength to consume them. This was done. But he began to lose weight. Dr. Colson returned from leave in September 1882. But instead of being anxious about the loss of weight he ascribed it to Vasudeo Balvant's refusal to take the full extras, remonstrated with him for the same and ordered him to begin taking the full extras again.

Vasudeo Balvant was, however, fed up with the jail life. His will to live had withered away, and in sheer disgust he went on a fast unto death in the Aden jail. When asked to break the fast he would only insist that his fetters should be removed and his living conditions improved. He would have breathed his last, but for an Indian jail doctor Dr. Manoharpant Barve from Phaltan in the Bombay Presidency. He tried to dissuade Vasudeo Balvant from his disastrous resolve with arguments and assurances of better conditions of life in the jail. Dr. Barve assured him that he would endeavour to improve his condition by certifying him unfit for any prison work and by recommending the hospital diet for him.<sup>21</sup> Finding that his condition was worsening day by day, Dr. Colson also had to act immediately. With the special permission of the Inspector General of Prisons he ordered special light fetters to be made for Vasudeo Balvant and informed him of the Government decision to replace his heavy fetters with the light ones. Upon this Vasudeo Balvant broke his fast.

But the British Government was fast succeeding in killing its adversary. Vasudeo Balvant showed no signs of recovery despite the concessions. Phthisis had a firm grip on his body and brought about a rapid decline in his health which completely collapsed on 15th January 1883. The jail authorities were now sure that the prisoner who was reduced to a skeleton would not attempt to escape again and therefore taking pity on him, removed his fetters shortly afterwards.<sup>22</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant was still mentally agile. On or about the 10th February, a week before his death, he drew the attention of Dr. Colson to the particular provision in the Jail Manual which enjoins upon the Government to release a sick prisoner. When it came to observing its own rules which would prevent it from vanquishing a political adversary, particularly an Indian

<sup>21</sup> Reminiscences about Vasudeo Balvant, by the late Mr. L. N. Joshi. The account was recently confirmed by Dr. Barve's son, Dr. D. M. Barve of Phaltan, by his letter dated 25th August 1959.

<sup>22</sup> Letter No. 543 of 1883 from the Superintendent of jail, Dr. Colson, to Government of Bombay, Bombay Government records.

revolutionary, the British bureaucracy had often honoured the rules in their breach. And so Dr. Colson only expressed his surprise how Vasudeo Balvant came to know the provision in the Jail Manual, but did nothing further. At last the merciful hand of death rushed in where the savage rule of British Government had refused to act, and Vasudeo Balvant soon reached the last lap of his journey on the earth.

Dr. Barve anxiously counted the patriot's last days. Vasudeo Balvant lay alone on his death-bed in a prison far away from his home. The jail officials were devoid of any sympathy for him. His aged father grief-stricken at the fate of his eldest son, his brothers subjected to the political wrath of an enraged empire, his wife bemoaning the plight of her beloved husband without even a letter from him for three complete years, and innumerable other relations and acquaintances grieved at his distressing misfortune lived hundreds of miles away at Shirdhon, in Poona and elsewhere. His ambition to liberate his motherland was destined to remain unfulfilled. The country of Hindustan had relapsed into a deep slumber of degrading slavery. Besides Dr. Barve, no one spoke even a word of consolation to him! But even at death's door the thoughts supreme in his mind could not have been different from those which he had cherished in similar condition, at Shree Shaila Mallikarjun. He had then said: "I will die. But even after death, I shall not let the English, who are wicked, wretched and devourers of their subjects rest in peace"! <sup>23</sup>

Vasudeo Balvant's condition grew worse on 17th February 1883. On the morning of that fateful day the doctors lost all hope of his recovery. Last-minute medicines were administered. But they proved ineffective. Towards the noon Vasudeo Balvant became restless. His bright brilliant eyes, void without life, darted about aimlessly. He soon entered a complete coma and his body went cold. The last guttural rose in intensity. At 4-20 p.m.<sup>24</sup> life was extinct in his earthly body and—

Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, the first Indian revolutionary to challenge Britain's sway over India, the angelic soul pining for Indian Independence, the valiant hero of Indian freedom movement and the tribune of the people breathed his last in the fort of Aden as a martyr in the cause of his Motherland. The pioneer revolutionary of India passed away in the fort of Aden on 17th February 1883!

<sup>23</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from the Government of Aden, dated 13th September 1947.

In death, as in life, Vasudeo Balvant was the bravest in the whole of India. Many hearts ached and many bright eyes were dimmed with tears when the news of his death went forth in his country.

No relation attended Vasudeo Balvant's funeral. The jail officials at Aden arranged for his cremation and lighted his funeral pyre on the shores of Aden. The precious person of Vasudeo Balvant valued at millions by his countrymen perished in the flames and was reduced to ashes! Within four hours, his earthly remains were blown to the winds on the bosom of the Arabian sea.

The fort of Aden is thus sanctified with the blood and sacrifice of life of the first Indian rebel under British rule and should, therefore, be a place of pilgrimage for the sons and daughters of free India.

Vasudeo Balvant's body perished and he went to eternal rest. But his soul was immortal and restless. It took its flight on the black day of 17th February 1883, and crossing oceans and rivers, hills and dales, reached India, infusing its insuppressible passion for Indian freedom into each Indian generation. The flame which the restless spirit kindled in 1883 itself developed into a mighty conflagration of the struggle for Indian freedom in which countless Indians fought and fell until at last the beautiful spectacle of Indian Independence emerged from it.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ORDEALS OF ASSOCIATES

VASUDEO BALVANT died in 1883. But what about his associates who could not be arrested by the Government? The account of their ordeals and long years in hiding is full of agonising pathos. The account is narrated here quite succinctly.

Ganesh Krishna Deodhar, a youth of twenty and a student, was sentenced only to a month's rigorous imprisonment on the jury's recommendation of mercy in the Dhamari "dacoity" case. After his release from the jail on the expiry of the jail term, he absconded in order to avoid further persecution or having to depose against Vasudeo Balvant. Sitaram Ayah Gokak and Gopal Hari Karve followed suit even before they were apprehended by the Government. The police vigorously searched for them after the papers of the case went to the Legal Remembrancer; but in vain.

Pandurang Balvant Phadke, the other younger brother of Vasudeo Balvant, went into hiding outside the province and returned home after many years of exile. The Government still refused a pleader's *sanad* to him at Panvel, and he had to migrate to Navsari where he somehow managed to secure it and practised as a lawyer. He learnt Gujarati and became quite proficient in it.

When Daniell went to the house of Krishnajipant Gogte, Mahajan's colleague serving at the toll *naka* at Gangapur, he disappeared by the back door. Daniell questioned Gogte's wife for his whereabouts. She, however, showed a marvellous presence of mind, and told Daniell that he had gone to answer the nature's call. Daniell waited for a while, posted a sentry at the house and went away. Gogte returned home after fourteen long years when the political atmosphere calmed down.

The story of Vishnu Vinayak Gadre is full of prolonged sufferings. He returned to Poona after the Konkan campaign. His marriage was settled and was scheduled to take place at Poona. The preliminary ceremonies were over and the marriage was to be solemnised at the appointed moment. Just then, however, he learnt of the mention of his name in the diary and the autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant. He dis-

appeared from the marriage pandal within a split second accompanied by Narayan Kanhere and Joshi, two of his co-workers. He left Poona for Dwarka as a *sannyasi* and lived a sequestered life for a long time. He eventually settled on the bank of the Narbada at the holy place of Karnali where he was sheltered by Pandit Velankar, a man of great erudition. Gadre attained exceptional mastery over the science of *yoga* and had even a vision of his deity. He lived in the Gayatri Mandir at Karnali for many years. His respect for Vasudeo Balvant did not diminish after the ordeal. He even had a portrait of Vasudeo Balvant hung on the wall of the temple after a few years. He also got married afterwards and eventually lived in Baroda. He died in 1905.

The police subjected Gadre's aged parents to brutal tortures to ascertain their son's whereabouts. Even the walls of their house were dug out by the police in their anxiety to recover incriminating articles and a daily call at police station was imposed on the aged parents. Gadre's aged father died as a result of the shock and the persecution, and his mother could reunite with her son only after many years when she left Khel for Benares on the pretext of going on a pilgrimage to that holy place.<sup>1</sup>

Kanhere too had attained great proficiency in supernatural powers. He had observed silence for many years as part of a vow. He became famous as Shree Sachchidanand Swami or Muni Maharaj, and had a large following of devotees. They till today adore and worship him. He died in 1934 and his devotees built a *samadhi* on the site of his cremation on the bank of the Bhima near Pandharpur. It is called "Dattashram".

That Gadre and others had not got alarmed and feared arrest because of the mention of their names in Vasudeo Balvant's diary and autobiography without any justification is clear from the following remark of the Legal Remembrancer: "I understand that several persons are now in custody, who have been arrested for the sole reason that their names appear in either the diary or the autobiography and Major Daniell is anxious to know what use can be made of the documents against them."<sup>2</sup> The remarks clearly indicate Government's anxiety to punish such persons as well.

<sup>1</sup> The *Kesari*, August 18, 1957.

<sup>2</sup> Opinion of the Legal Remembrancer, dated 28th September 1879, Bombay Government records.

Bhaskar Jyotishi, evidently a participant in many projects of Vasudeo Balvant and one of his staunchest admirers, was sounding the Raja of Gahrwal in Northern India on his help in the rising, after having entered his Court as an astrologer and a palmist. When Vasudeo Balvant was arrested, Bhaskar disappeared and concealed himself in Benares. Abdul Hakk and Daniell tried their utmost to arrest him; but failed. It was not till after a month and a half that the Benares authorities, who, from the information conveyed to them by the Poona police, were on the *qui vive*, could succeed in arresting him. Nothing further, however, is known about him.

Nor could Ismailkhan Rohilla and the Lingayat adventurers, Vasudeo Balvant's companions of a very different type, escape the consequences. Later on, in March 1880, they were prosecuted for promising to supply the fighting men to Vasudeo Balvant before Major Dobbs at Shahabad and convicted. Ismailkhan was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment and the other two adventurers to eighteen months' and a year's rigorous imprisonment respectively.

With these accounts of only some of the exiled associates of Vasudeo Balvant, India continued to ask for years: "What happened to others? Where had they gone?" and bewildered history echoed: "Where?"

## CHAPTER XX

### GOPIKABAI PHADKE

THE grandeur of the sufferings and sacrifices of Indian revolutionaries has often obscured the lifelong privations suffered by their wives—privations often unknown, unhonoured and unsung. The first wife of Vasudeo Balvant escaped the ordeal on account of her premature death. But the life of his second wife, Gopikabai Phadke, was one continuous sad tale of grief, hardships and self-abnegation. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* described Vasudeo Balvant as an angel. Gopikabai Phadke was truly a *Devata*.

Gopikabai was called Baisaheb. Near relatives called her Bai. With the agonising farewell from her husband when he left home for the revolt, Bai stayed at her father-in-law's house at Shirdhon after a short stay at Junnar. She heard of the exploits of her husband also at Shirdhon. "He has half burnt the city of Poona; proclamation has been issued by the Government for his arrest; he is arrested in the Nizam's territory; he is tortured in police custody. His trial has commenced at Poona. He is to be burnt alive in the boiler of a steam ship." She heard these bits of news while at Shirdhon until at last the crippling blow struck her. Vasudeo Balvant was sentenced to transportation for life! No life transportee had till then returned alive from the "Black Waters", and the dreadful implication of the news was quite clear to Bai.

Vasudeo Balvant had once asked her: "What will you do after me?" And she had exclaimed: "I'll not live even for a month after I learn of your death." "Is the time to execute this resolve near at hand?" she wondered.

Bai was eager to go to Poona to meet her husband. But women belonging to high-class families seldom went to meet their husbands in jail in those days. This social tradition and the lofty wall of bureaucracy which did not allow the relatives of a political revolutionary to meet him rose between Bai and her desire and she was unable to meet Vasudeo Balvant.

While Bai lamented this misfortune her brother Ganesh, hardly in his teens, was convicted of perjury by Mr. Hammick at Poona in November 1879. He was sentenced to be flogged



eighteen times with rattan. On hearing the news Bai's veins throbbed as if they were going to drop out of her body. Hardly after a month, in January 1880, Vasudeo Balvant was removed to Aden without being allowed to meet her. Bai felt that her most precious treasure was lost to her for ever.

Vasudeo Balvant was fully conscious of Bai's great qualities and thus praised her in his autobiography: "The disposition of this wife is milder than that of the first one. Both liked company. My first wife would at least once in a way speak about ornaments. But my second wife never uttered even a single word about them. It can be said that I have not bought a farthing's worth gold or silver or even a brass utensil since this (revolutionary) work began. . . . It is difficult to get a wife like my second wife among a million, gentle, calm, reserved and sensible. I suffered no anxiety whatever since I married her. No words would be sufficient to describe her good qualities. She is skilful in the culinary art and she is also very cheerful."

Bai considered the whole family to be her own and for both her brother-in-law and her step-daughter, Mathutai, she maintained her affection throughout her life. Mathutai was given in marriage to Rambhau Karve of Palaspe. After marriage her name was changed to Sitabai. She often came to meet Bai and stayed with her either at Shirdhon or at Panvel. She died in 1930.

While Bai lived at Shirdhon people around were afraid to speak with her. Others made ungenerous references to her husband. Bai, however, bore these insults with great courage in the hope that her husband would some day return alive from the "Black Waters". Her hope, however, was not fulfilled. She could not meet her husband; nor could she write to or receive from him any letter.

The staggering news that Vasudeo Balvant had died at Aden, on 17th February 1883, was communicated to Bai by the Inspector General of Prisons, Dr. Cruickshank, on 19th February 1883.<sup>1</sup> It was pursuant to a Government Resolution<sup>2</sup> directing him to do so, and based on a telegram from the Political Resident at Aden which was received by the Bombay Government about 8 p.m. on 17th February 1883.<sup>3</sup> It read: "Life convict Wassudew Bulwunt Phadke died this afternoon."

The news struck Bai like a bolt from the blue. It was sudden,

<sup>1</sup> Letter from the Government of Aden, dated 13th September 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Government Resolution No. 1262 of 1883, Government of Bombay.

<sup>3</sup> Telegram from the Political Resident at Aden, dated 17th February 1883, Bombay Government records.

shocking and crippling. Her elderly relatives including her aged father-in-law stood stupefied as Bai wept bitterly until at last her tears were frozen. Thereafter she lived at Shirdhon, wordless and cheerless, recollecting the sweet remembrances of her husband and looking after the comforts of her father-in-law and other members of the large family. Latterly she spent a good deal of time in prolonged prayers. Her father-in-law died in 1908. After a few years, when her two nephews took the degrees in law and medicine respectively and began practising at Panvel, Bai lived with them.

The present generation remembers Bai as she appears in her photograph in this book. After her husband's death she adopted a widow's dress according to Hindu tradition ; she was of light complexion, a slight figure and medium height yet of a strong build. Her personal demeanour was endearing and impressive. Her health was sound and she had almost no illness till her death. She was serious and grave in appearance. Her forehead was deeply furrowed by lifelong cares. But she never displayed disgust or temper in her dealings with men around her. With a width of jaw seen in very few women she had a straight nose which added grace to her little loving eyes, inward-looking and overwhelmed with past grief. When Bai smiled her aged face used to be covered with wrinkles. It pained the onlookers. But they enjoyed the rare sight of her smile. For Bai smiled only on rare occasions.

Bai always spoke in a low tone and seldom got angry. Her guests and visitors immediately felt that they were speaking with a venerable old lady who had bravely faced many a trying crisis in past life with courage, patience and a composed mind.

Nobody in the house flouted Bai's wishes. But if perchance anybody unconsciously did and Bai did not like it, her resentment never manifested itself in loud angry words. Bai's anger also was peaceful ! On such occasions she would cease to speak. Her silence, however, was more effective than the angry outburst of others. The men around acted according to her wishes. The little ones, however, held fast to their proposals despite her disapproval and with playful insistence on carrying them out secured her consent to them, making her smile while doing so.

On rare occasions Bai demonstrated her mastery over wielding arms. In 1896-97, on the Vijaydashmi day, a great Dassera function was held at the village of Apte near Shirdhon. At the pressing requests of the villagers assembled on the occasion,

Baisaheb, as she was affectionately called by many, did a few feats of wielding *dandpatta* before the assembly.<sup>4</sup>

Although religious by temperament Bai never abhorred the reformist or progressive views and conduct of the younger generation. The dramatic plays could not, however, have any fascination for her. When the renowned stage-actor, Bal Gandharva, raised the Marathi stage to the pinnacle of glory she was pressed hard by her nephews to witness his superb acting. But Bai declined to do so. Cinema, however, she could not completely avoid. She saw a few mythological and historical films, among them the much-talked-of "Sant Tukaram" of the Prabhat Film Company of Poona. She pronounced the film to be exquisitely fine.

Thrifty by nature, Bai never exploited the generosity of her nephews. When she started on a pilgrimage to Benares her nephews asked her how much money she would require. But she refused to name any amount. Her nephew then gave her money which he thought would be required by her. Bai, however, spent an amount which was barely necessary during her pilgrimage and returned the balance to her nephew on her return to Panvel. She told her nephew that she would take it from him whenever she required it.

Bai was fond of rebellious children. Their proficiency in physical exercise or in arts like that of swimming won her admiration. She advised the children doing daily *namaskars* and building up the body. She daily taught them new lyrics and *stotras* by the light of the lamp. Surrounded by the little ones, Bai appeared on such occasions like a family deity, calm, revered and serene.

Bai seldom spoke about her husband. It was almost in the closing years of her life that her daughter-in-law could make her eloquent about her husband and noted down her memoirs about him. Leaders of public opinion while on a visit to Panvel often went for her *darshan*. On such occasions Bai exclaimed: "The one whom they should have seen has passed away. What of a poor woman like me now?" The visitor, however, was overjoyed to pay his respects to her. When Savarkar went to Panvel for the first time in 1938 he offered the auspicious coconut and flowers to Bai and bowed down to her, describing her husband as the fountain-source of inspiration of the nation. He also expressed his firm faith that

<sup>4</sup> *Prabodhankar* Thakre's reminiscences, *The Dnyanaprakash*, June 7, 1939.

her husband's goal of independence would surely be accomplished in the near future.

Vasudeo Balvant has mentioned in his autobiography Bai's inclination not to live even for a month after she learnt of his death. He says: "She is of a steadfast nature and will not fail to carry out her resolve."<sup>5</sup> Her prolonged widowhood was, therefore, a puzzle to many. But Bai herself solved the mystery when once she heard of the death of an acquaintance. "Only those whose fate has so ordained would die; others would never succeed in departing this life!" she said and revealed how she had twice tried to end her life by taking opium after her husband's death, but had failed in the attempt.

Of late the press gave much publicity to the articles on Vasudeo Balvant, and the people eulogised his services to the motherland. When she heard of such items in the press she exclaimed: "How strange is the world. It described him as demented during his lifetime and is now showering words of praise on his memory." Bai spoke the eternal truth about the ways of the world. Pioneers have always to face this tradition of the world.

After a long life full of excitements, grief and cares, Bai fell seriously ill in 1940. She never recovered from this illness. During the illness she unerringly foretold the complications week after week and negotiated the hard road to death from February to August 1940. Her many relatives from distant places came down to Panvel to meet her for the last time. She gave alms to the poor and presented her relatives with mementos. By the first week of September 1940, she began to lose consciousness. At the end of the week she said: "I would now live only for four days. Thereafter I shall pass away."

At last the black day of 11th September 1940 arrived with its gloom. The lean emaciated body of Baisaheb lay on her death-bed surrounded by her nephews, daughters-in-law, grandchildren and others. The flame in the auspicious lamp nearby rose and sank, moving its shadow on the floor to and fro as if to symbolise the swing of life and death of the departing one. And at twenty minutes past one on the night of 11th September 1940, Bai breathed her last. The aged mother of a generation and the life-companion of a pioneer revolutionary of India passed away to the great sobs, wails and tears of all!

<sup>5</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

## CHAPTER XXI

### RETROSPECT

**I**N the long line of the great patriots of India Vasudeo Balvant Phadke occupies a unique position. When with anguished heart Mother India started in quest of her liberators only one heroic soul responded to her call in 1879. Because of his exploits and stormy revolt the hearts of his countrymen throbbed with reverence and excitement at the mention of his name. The name of Vasudeo Balvant became a symbol of political revolt for a long time.

It was a thrilling delight for his people to hear and narrate the reminiscences and anecdotes about him as also his exploits. He was one of the most prominent national heroes in the pre-Tilak days. Stressing this fact, the late Mr. N. C. Kelkar wrote : "Vasudeo Balvant holds a place of distinction before Tilak came on the political scene. Madhavrao Ranade organised a grand political movement while in Government service. But Phadke went a step further and organised a movement of political revolt while in Government service. . . . After Peshwa Nanasaheb it was Phadke alone whose name struck a grim terror in the hearts of Englishmen."<sup>1</sup>

Possessing a towering personality befitting a rebel, Vasudeo Balvant was a prince among men and the tallest among common people. His ivory-white complexion, aquiline nose and penetrating brilliant bluish eyes under a fine broad forehead at once charmed those who came in contact with him. His ambition grappled with infinity. He was endowed with immense self-confidence and dash to strike the first effective blow at the newly established British Raj. He was an inspired born leader of men. He belonged to the first educated generation of India under the British rule, and was well acquainted with the deceptive policy of the British rulers and their slogans and shibboleths under which fluently flowed the British lust of power and exploitation, ostensibly through a rule of law.

He was a linguist and could speak English, Marathi, Telugu, Kanarese and Mussalmani (Urdu) with equal fluency.<sup>2</sup> He also knew Sanskrit. With his vocal persuasive power in these

<sup>1</sup> N. C. Kelkar, *Life of Lokamanya Tilak* (Marathi), Vol. I, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Autobiography of Vasudeo Balvant.

languages he exerted a powerful influence over his followers. Peasants, villagers and tribesmen welcomed him with unfeigned delight whenever he visited them, and he recruited several of them for fighting purposes. Some of them were thoroughly imbued with his hymn of hatred against the British Raj and he moulded them into men of action. He commanded such a universal respect amongst them that during subsequent investigations some of them refused to oblige the Government by admitting that they were instigated to revolt by Vasudeo Balvant. Others refused to do so in the open Court, and many of them said that accused No. 1 in the dock (Vasudeo Balvant) was not the man who led them to fight against the Government. Some of them denied that they ever knew Vasudeo Balvant.

His men were mostly armed with matchlocks, crowbars, sticks and spears. But the spirit behind these weapons in no way differed from that behind the machine-guns and cannons of the last victorious army of nationalist India under Netaji Subhash-chandra Bose. If a solitary conspiracy of plunder requires rare ability in its organiser what uncommon qualities of leadership must have been possessed by Vasudeo Balvant, who resisted the lure of a comfortable life, and organised a revolt against the British rule, when death on gallows was the sure consequence and success in the cause doubtful?

Vasudeo Balvant never repented for having risen in revolt and having had to face the consequences of his actions. He says in his autobiography: "I do not dread God! I go to join issue with him. I have done nothing superhuman in this (sacrificing my all in your cause)." With this humility he faced adverse calamities and death with absolute fearlessness. Although fortune never smiled on him in his mission and his path was strewn over with thorns of struggle, suffering and sacrifice he held fast heroically to the path of propagating the message of freedom to his nation, and waking it up to its thralldom.

Vasudeo Balvant was essentially a child of environment. The loss of the ancestral greatness, honour and power which his forefathers enjoyed in the days of Swaraj, the cruel treatment meted out to him in service by his European bosses, the devastating famine in the Deccan and the traditional freedom-loving atmosphere in Poona fanned the embers of his revolutionary instincts. But a spark needs an explosive magazine to start a blaze. The provocative environment clashed against the idealist and sensitive personality in Vasudeo Balvant and he rose in revolt against heavy odds.

Once his revolt broke out, it destroyed the blind faith of the Indians that there was at least security, if not prosperity, under British Raj. Like a violent storm his revolt rocked the whole Government administration, and dealt a deathblow to the myth of there being security under the new Raj. The iron rule of the British Government broke down in several districts and people's confidence in its stability was rudely shaken.

The revolt of Vasudeo Balvant also revolutionised the current concepts of political objectives, and departed from the current ways of political agitation like prayers and petitions. For he proclaimed the birthright of Indians to absolute political independence, and attempted to win Indian freedom through an armed revolt. In these two deeds he placed before India its ultimate goal and the means of achieving it as early as the seventies of the last century.

Vasudeo Balvant also gave a rude shock to the prevalent social concepts. He struck at the very root of the superiority complex of the so-called upper classes when he rubbed shoulders even with the humblest classes of the society and ate and mixed with them. He thus discarded untouchability and caste distinctions years ago. For, many of his men were "untouchables" whose very shadow was a calamity for Brahmins in those days.

The disastrous exploitation of the poor by the rich and of both by the British as well as the growing poverty of the Indian people under British rule enraged Vasudeo Balvant. And by shedding lurid light on these banes of British Raj, he unmasked the claim of a better living for Indians under British rule much boasted of by the British Government. He also robbed the rich to feed the poor, and in so doing was clearly actuated by ideas of social justice and a desire to render justice to the have-nots.

Vasudeo Balvant was undoubtedly the first ancestor of Indian revolutionaries and soldiers of freedom. His first place among the leaders of Indian freedom movement is noteworthy in many ways. His life was a saga of toil, sweat, blood and tears, the prototype of that of many martyrs after him. When great learned Pundits and politicians, mostly by conviction, although some rarely as strategists, faltered to proclaim our ideal of absolute political independence, Vasudeo Balvant openly proclaimed it. He was the first Indian leader to go from village to village to preach the *mantra* of Swaraj and to exhort the people to rebel against foreign rule. The first patriot to discard the luxury of a wealthy life for the sake of his nation, Vasudeo

Balvant was also the first to give up a high-paid job in the national cause. He first established an independent school, with a nationalist outlook, for people's education in India. His heart always throbbed with a tremendous urge for Indian freedom, and he literally wept over its loss as if the loss was a personal one. He had a burning hatred of foreigners and everything foreign. He was the first revolutionary to take a vow of using only Swadeshi products—a common distinction of his successors in the political field. He was the leader of the first political revolt against the British Government organised by a single individual. His was the first revolt to compel the British Government to move its troops for the arrest of a revolutionary leader. He was the first Indian revolutionary whose name resounded in the heart of the British Empire. His exploits had become the sole topic for quite a few days in the political circles in London. Proclamations of a big reward for the capture of an underground revolutionary were first issued by the British Government in his times. Curfew due to political unrest as well as collective fines to curb national sympathy for political unrest were first resorted to by the British Government during his revolt. The charges of conspiring to wage war against the British Government and collecting men and weapons for the purpose as also of sedition were first preferred in India against him. He was the first patriot to suffer a political transportation on these charges and to die a martyr on the "Black Waters" in the cause of our motherland. He first saw with the vision of a prophet and first proclaimed India's ultimate goal of an *Indian Republic*. This very goal became a reality for India after sixty-eight years. He was truly a pioneer of his nation in many respects.

He was a man of tempestuous and meteoric career. We must, therefore, judge him not by his actual achievements, but by his ultimate ideal which was not till then placed before India by anybody. His legacy to the nation was not a political organisation, but a political faith and the message of sacrifice and heroic martyrdom in the nation's cause. Impatient of waiting for the accomplishment of a great goal, he summoned his country to a task which was beyond its ability and certainly beyond its prevalent desires. And so he failed; but failed in a magnificent task with magnificent endeavour to accomplish it. Had he returned alive to India from Aden, he would have left a precious legacy of a prison-tale of rare charm for future generations.



India respected and loved Vasudeo Balvant as if he was an angel. The applause with a suffix "ki jay" to a leader's name first originated in public congregations in his times when thousands of Indians vociferously cheered him every day during his trial at Poona and during his journey to Thana. He had no son to offer him *pindadan* on his death anniversary. Hundreds of Maharashtrian households, therefore, offered it to him on the day consecrated to the memory of their departed ancestors as if he was their own ancestor. His photographs were sold in thousands, and people preserved them in secret like a treasure. Lokamanya Tilak had treasured one such photograph between those of Nana Saheb of the war of 1857 fame and Rash Behari Bose, the leader of a later revolt. On the back of the photograph appear the words "Kashikar Bawa".

In Vasudeo Balvant's own mansion at Shirdhon the old goat cart, now partly repaired, the picture of Shree Datta, the manuscript of his intended publication on the life of Datta, the silver case—*samputa*—with the *padukas* of Shree Datta which he worshipped and a torn issue of the *Dnyanaprakash*, an Anglo-Marathi journal of Poona, which contained the report of his trial were his only relics recently discovered by the present author.

Vasudeo Balvant's father, Balvantrao, died as late as February 1908. He seldom spoke about his son and if anybody opened the topic with him the memory of his son mauled his heart and he wept. Bhaskar Vishnu Phadke, editor of the *Vihari*, a nationalist weekly of Bombay, now defunct, and his colleague Sadashiv Vinayak Barve once went to Shirdhon in 1906 and met Balvantrao. When they referred to Vasudeo Balvant, Balvantrao said nothing, but wept and shed tears, recollecting the fate of his son.<sup>3</sup>

After the War of Indian Independence of 1857 and before the world-wide revolutionary movement led by Savarkar, the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant constitutes an important landmark in the history of India's struggle for freedom. Valentine Chirol refers to it in the following words: "... Not to go back to the exploits of Nana Saheb ... and his followers during the Mutiny or to the Ramoshi Rebellion round Poona in 1879, it was in Poona that the native press first assumed that tone of virulent hostility towards British rule and British rulers which led to the Press Act of 1879. . . ." <sup>4</sup> The first press law enacted to curb

<sup>3</sup> Reminiscences of the late Mr. G. K. Phadke, nephew of Vasudeo Balvant.

<sup>4</sup> Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, pp. 39-40.

the Indian nationalist press was thus partly the direct result of the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant.

The revolt was the biggest explosion of a revolutionary project organised by one man. The convicts and transportees in the cases arising out of the revolt numbered over sixty—more than those in any other political case in India.

Commenting on the implication of the revolt, Sir Richard Temple, the Governor of Bombay, said: "... The Brahmin leader and his immediate adherents were avowedly forming a conspiracy against the Government, . . . and though any exaggeration of the importance of such silly and clumsy designs ought to be avoided still these occurrences demand the thoughtful attention of politicians!"<sup>5</sup>

The effect of Vasudeo Balvant's revolt on the British ruling classes was the almost immediate birth of the Indian National Congress at the hands of one belonging to them. The late Mr. A. O. Hume founded the Congress as a safety-valve to the smouldering Indian discontent to avoid its outburst in the shape of a revolt like the rising of 1857. In 1876-77 Mr. Hume, who was for about nine years a Secretary to the Government of India, smelt the signs of such a revolt through official reports, which only confirmed him in his eagerness to start such an organisation. The revolt, however, actually once more broke out in the Deccan in 1879, and it hastened the birth of the Congress at his hands in 1885 soon after his resignation from Government service in 1882. Wedderburn, in his biography of Hume, describes the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant as follows: "The forecast of trouble was in exact accordance with what actually occurred in Bombay Presidency in connection with the agrarian rising. . . . It began with sporadic gang robberies and attacks on the money-lenders until the bands became too strong for the police; and the whole military force at Poona—horse, foot and artillery—had to take the field against them. Roaming through the jungle tracts of the Western Ghats, these bands dispersed in the presence of military force, only to reunite immediately at some convenient point. . . . A leader from the more instructed class was found, calling himself Sivaji the Second, who addressed challenges to the Government, offered a reward . . . for the head of H.E. Sir Richard Temple (then Governor of Bombay) and claimed to lead a *national revolt* upon the lines on which the Mahratta power had originally been founded."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Sir Richard Temple, *India in 1880*, pp. 198, 199.

<sup>6</sup> Sir William Wedderburn, *Allen Octavian Hume*, C. B., p. 82.

People who enjoyed the comforts of ancestral legacy and seldom gave any thought to national aspirations described Vasudeo Balvant as a visionary and a dacoit. But he proved to be a perpetual source of inspiration to Indian revolutionaries and nationalists, and sustained the national struggle in this part of the country for at least three generations. Being the first rebel against the British rule before Tilak entered Indian politics, he was naturally a national hero to almost all the politically conscious minds and great leaders belonging to diverse schools of political thought from the late Dr. M. R. Jayakar,<sup>7</sup> one of the greatest liberals and constitutionalists, to Swatantryaveer Savarkar, the prince of Indian revolutionaries.<sup>8</sup> His ways to obtain money for a national cause were adopted by revolutionaries in Bengal and the Punjab. When the house of Vasudeo Balvant Gogate, who shot at Hotson, an Acting Governor of Bombay, in 1931, was searched, two photographs were recovered by the police from his residence. One was that of Savarkar and the other of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke.

The exploits in Vasudeo Balvant's romantic career were a nice subject for litterateurs to make use of in their works. His life was dramatised on the Marathi stage, and the play had attained considerable popularity in Maharashtra for many years.<sup>9</sup> The scene of his arrest and his brave challenge to Major Daniell in the play evoked a thunderous applause from the audience in the theatre. His life was sung in many ballads and folksongs. To hear them was the usual entertainment in the rural areas. As in poetry, so also in prose, he lived for decades. An extract or two from a novel, which had his life and revolt for the background of the story, make interesting reading :

" . . . Thinking that his prosperous days would continue for long, he (Vasudeo Balvant) had budgeted his expenditure on a political plane. He thought that he was a King and that the Sahebs would run away from Bombay to England in his fear in a few days. Vasudeorao was going to move to the airy Government House at Walkeshwar and open his main office in the Town Hall in the Fort after the Governor had left Bombay. He had decided to give the *Gadi* of Poona to Hari Ramoshi and the *jahgir* of Satara to Ganya Mang. . . ." The following description of his camp appears in the novel : " When he was fearlessly camping in the secluded mango grove in a valley along

<sup>7</sup> M. R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, Vol. I, pp. viii, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Swatantryaveer Savarkar, *My Autobiography, Political Background* (Marathi), pp. 52-53.

<sup>9</sup> P. G. Kanekar, *Some Recollections of the Marathi Stage* (Marathi) p. 21.

with his fighting men and their camp-kits, a great revelry sprang up in his camp. His Ramoshi or Mang followers took out their tiny drums and Indian zithers and sang in harmony with them. Some played at cards. Others invited the *tamasgirs* with dancing girls from neighbouring hamlets to the camp, and passed the whole night enjoying their dances. When the night was starry and the moonshine swept the country he sat upon a tiger-skin spread on a spacious rock, and played his favourite *sitar* in different tunes. . . . His generosity always attracted mendicants to his camp. He gave them alms according to their status. . . . He never dined alone. But had always a score of guests for dinner. His disposition was not selfish. . . . But he sincerely desired that his country should become free, and his people should be delivered from foreign bondage and become happy."<sup>10</sup> The extracts are tinged with romanticism; but they reveal the popular interest in Vasudeo Balvant's exploits.

The tragedy which cast a gloom over the middle-class homes whose members participated and suffered in the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant is also pictured in a pathetic style by many Marathi short-story writers.

The revolt provided an interesting theme for English authors as well. When Major Daniell went back to England he is stated to have written a book of his experiences during the revolt. In 1925, Dr. George Nundy wrote a very popular series in the Sunday edition of the *Bombay Chronicle* entitled "Experiences of a Detective Officer in India". The initial articles in the series covered the exploits of Vasudeo Balvant. The political condition in India did not favour the publication of articles on Vasudeo Balvant from a sympathetic pen till 1929 when the late Mr. L. N. Joshi of Poona wrote a similar series in the *Mouj*, a Marathi weekly of Bombay. The first biography of Vasudeo Balvant, brief and cursory, yet in its way an important one as the only publication of its kind till India was free, by the late Mr. R. G. Borvankar of Thana, was also published after great difficulty in 1929.

It was impossible that such an interesting life would escape the ever-watchful eyes of cine-producers. But it was not possible for them to risk the huge investment required for filming the life as long as British Government ruled India. In 1947, when this biography was published in Marathi, the difficulty existed no more, and through the enterprising efforts of

<sup>10</sup> B. M. Pandit, *Sushil Yamuna, or The storm of the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke* (Marathi), pp. 88-89.

Mr. Vishram Bedekar, one of the able and distinguished cine-directors of our country, the film biography of Vasudeo Balvant was out in March 1950 and was a great success.

On 10th May 1939, the first tricoloured picture of Vasudeo Balvant was published by his nephew. And a memorial pillar raised to his memory at Shirdhon was unveiled on 14th November 1940, at an imposing ceremonial function by the late Mr. R. N. Mandlik. The names of prominent Indian martyrs inscribed on the memorial pillar at Tripuri session of the Congress also included the name of Vasudeo Balvant.

On 1st February 1943, Swatantryaveer Savarkar visited Shirdhon. Speaking in front of the memorial pillar, he said : " The flame of the passion for Indian freedom burning in our hearts was lit by that in the heart of Vasudeo Balvant. The auspicious lamp burning from the top of this pillar is an appropriate memorial to the martyr. When you need a spark and have to struggle for light the lamp will illuminate your hearts, show you the path."

The birth centenary of Vasudeo Balvant fell on 4th November 1945. The Indian will to be free had then reached its peak. The famous I.N.A. Trial also opened in the Red Fort at Delhi the same day. The main centenary celebrations were held at Shirdhon in such atmosphere under the presidentship of Mr. L. B. Bhopatkar.

A large number of people had gathered to celebrate the centenary in a specially erected pandal decorated with flags and festoons near the house where Vasudeo Balvant was born a hundred years before.

Wreaths were placed on the memorial on behalf of many organisations. Messages wishing success to the celebrations were received from prominent Indian leaders including Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Veer Savarkar. Presiding on the occasion Mr. Bhopatkar paid glowing tributes to the memory of Vasudeo Balvant and said : "The goal of complete Independence first proclaimed by Vasudeo Balvant still remains India's goal, and our struggle shall not stop until India is delivered from foreign yoke and becomes independent. There is no power on earth which can stop our onward march to freedom."

Prominent newspapers all over India in almost all languages published the life-account of Vasudeo Balvant, and paid glowing tributes to his memory. A Bombay weekly wrote editorially : ". . . When free India sets up a martyrs' gallery she will not forget to bestow a befitting niche to Vasudeo

Phadke. . . ."<sup>11</sup> Another wrote: ". . . Although the name of Phadke is overshadowed by the other mighty sons of Maharashtra—Tilak, Ranade and Gokhale—yet Phadke claims chronological precedence. He lived and struggled for his motherland at a time when nationalism meant nothing in India. He died even before the foundation of the Congress was laid. Although his ashes lie far away from his homeland his soul has joined the Valhalla of great Indians who have left their footprints on the sands of Indian history!"<sup>12</sup>

It is, however, observed that an assertion is made about Vasudeo Balvant and his revolt in 1879 in the compilation published by the Government of Bombay, which betrays a great lack of historical perspective. It says: "In the nature of things such a campaign (the revolt of Vasudeo Balvant) was bound to be short-lived and very small affair," and adds that Vasudeo Balvant "did not receive much education,"<sup>13</sup> possibly meaning that he was not entitled to be called an educated man. In both these assertions the events of 1879 are viewed against the background of the progress of political thought and the standard of education in 1957. A graduate's degree, if education is at all to be judged by the holding of a University degree, may be a common accomplishment in 1957. It was certainly not so in 1862 or 1879. Passing a few standards in the English school was the common attainment of educated classes in those days, and judged by this standard Vasudeo Balvant undoubtedly belonged to the educated class of his generation. And how can his revolt also be a "very small affair"? The slogans of Swaraj or "Vande Mataram" meant nothing in 1943 or 1945. But their utterance in 1908 was certainly an ordeal which meant Government prosecution and a sentence of flogging or rigorous imprisonment for those who uttered the slogans at the hands of the Government. Can a revolt which compelled the Government to move its troops for suppressing it, which proclaimed for the first time in history our goal of an *Indian Republic*, on which prominent newspapers all over India and in London wrote main editorials, which was the talk of the whole country and political circles in London itself for quite a few days, and which decidedly hastened the very birth of the Congress, be a "very small affair" in 1879? But the above assertions are the result of incorrect appraisal of history and therefore deserve

<sup>11</sup> The *Blitz*, November 3, 1945.

<sup>12</sup> The *Forum*, November 11, 1945.

<sup>13</sup> *Source Material for A History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I, p. 73. A Government of Bombay publication.

to be rejected forthwith. People with such incorrect historical perspective would do well to clean their spectacles and look again.

The footprints of Vasudeo Balvant on the sands of time shine forth with eternal glory, and cannot be obliterated by prejudice or slight. A nation which forgets its martyrs has no future. For all those, therefore, who look forward to a bright future for the Indian nation Vasudeo Balvant lives through his heroic deeds and glorious death. And as long as the words 'Indian nationalism and national gratitude for the martyrs of the land' last the name of Vasudeo Balvant would shine forth with unique splendour in the history of the Indian struggle for freedom.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Akhada</i>	— Gymnasium.
<i>Angarkha</i>	— Garment with strings.
<i>Anushthan</i>	— Prolonged prayers for a specific object.
<i>Avatar</i>	— Rebirth of a great man who is dead.
<i>Baithak</i>	— Physical exercise of sitting down on toes and getting up.
<i>Bania</i>	— Merchant.
<i>Bilva</i>	— A tree whose leaves are Shiva's favourites.
<i>Bund</i>	— Revolt.
<i>Chanchi</i>	— Cloth case for keeping betel-leaves, areca nuts, etc.
<i>Chaudi</i>	— Rest house outside a village.
<i>Chhakda</i>	— Light fast-moving bullock cart.
<i>Chhakda</i>	— Fond of a Chhakda.
<i>Daftar</i>	— Papers.
<i>Dandpatta</i>	— Weapon with a long elastic steel blade.
<i>Darshan</i>	— Sight of God or a saint.
<i>Devata</i>	— Goddess.
<i>Dewanship</i>	— Prime Ministership of an Indian State.
<i>Dharmashala</i>	— Rest house for travellers.
<i>Dharmashastra</i>	— Religious law.
<i>Doli</i>	— Rude palanquin carried by servants.
<i>Duffedar</i>	— Minor cavalry officer.
<i>Gadi</i>	— Throne.
<i>Galli</i>	— Lane.
<i>Gandha</i>	— Sandle paste applied to forehead after bath.
<i>Ganjiphas</i>	— A kind of playing-cards.
<i>Ghat</i>	— Embankment and flight of steps built on river bank.
<i>Handi</i>	— Large glass light suspended from a ceiling.
<i>Houda</i>	— Wrestling ring.
<i>Inam</i>	— Land given as gift, free of taxes.
<i>Ingraj Sarkar</i>	— British Government.
<i>Jahgir</i>	— Land granted as a reward for service rendered.
<i>Kacheri</i>	— Government office.
<i>Kale Pani</i>	— Transportation.
<i>Kamdar</i>	— Labourer.
<i>Karnakundala</i>	— Earring.
<i>Khaddar</i>	— Cloth of hand-spun or indigenous yarn.
<i>Khandi</i>	— Measure equal to 20 maunds.



<i>Killedar</i>	— Fort-commander.
<i>Kumkum-Patrika</i>	— Invitation to marriage ceremony.
<i>Kundala</i>	— Earring.
<i>Langot</i>	— Triangular loinwear.
<i>Lathi</i>	— Long staff used as a weapon.
<i>Lota</i>	— Flat or round-bottomed vessel for keeping water.
<i>Mahakshetra</i>	— Highly holy place.
<i>Maharaj</i>	— Great man.
<i>Maharaja</i>	— Great king.
<i>Mahatma</i>	— High-souled man.
<i>Mandir</i>	— Temple.
<i>Mantra</i>	— Sacred text used as incantation; Message.
<i>Modi</i>	— A script of Marathi in running hand.
<i>Mohur</i>	— Golden coin.
<i>Musafir</i>	— Traveller.
<i>Naib</i>	— Deputy.
<i>Naik</i>	— Corporal of Indian infantry.
<i>Naka</i>	— Square.
<i>Namaskar</i>	— Prostration before God or idol as a form of exercise.
<i>Paduka</i>	— Replica of sacred feet.
<i>Panch</i>	— Witness at police search.
<i>Pandit</i>	— Learned man.
<i>Pansupari</i>	— Ceremonial presentation of betel-leaves, areca nut, etc. to a guest.
<i>Patil</i>	— Village police officer.
<i>Peth</i>	— Ward of a city.
<i>Pheta</i>	— Turban of long strip of cloth wound up round the head.
<i>Pindadan</i>	— Religious offering of rice to departed ancestors on their death anniversary.
<i>Puggree</i>	— A kind of turban.
<i>Puranpoli</i>	— Bread stuffed with cooked gram-flour and gur.
<i>Raj</i>	— Government.
<i>Ram Ram</i>	— A form of greeting.
<i>Rojgar</i>	— Employment.
<i>Rudraksha</i>	— Fruit of a tree worn in earrings or rosary by devotees.
<i>Saheb</i>	— Englishman or a European; Person of rank.
<i>Samadhi</i>	— Structure built over relics of a holy man.
<i>Samartha</i>	— Person with divine powers.
<i>Sanad</i>	— Court's permission for practising at the Bar.
<i>Sandhya</i>	— Religious prayers, offered thrice a day, by Brahmins.
<i>Sannyasi</i>	— One who has renounced the world.
<i>Sardar</i>	— Military commander; A title conferred by British Government.
<i>Saree</i>	— Main garment of Indian women.

<i>Sati</i>	— Custom of Hindu widows immolating themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres.
<i>Saucar</i>	— Money-lender.
<i>Sham-Sool-Umra</i>	— Chief of noblemen.
<i>Shela</i>	— Rich silken upper-cloth.
<i>Shigram</i>	— Closed horse carriage.
<i>Shraddha</i>	— Annual religious ceremony for remembrance of and making offerings to departed ancestors on death anniversary.
<i>Shreeman</i>	— Title of honour (Lit: Prosperous).
<i>Siddhi</i>	— Emancipation of soul from worldly and bodily bondage.
<i>Sitar</i>	— Stringed instrument played with a wire-nail.
<i>Stotras</i>	— Hymns of God or supernatural powers.
<i>Subhedar</i>	— Governor of a province of Mogul Empire. Army Officer.
<i>Surwar</i>	— Trousers tight from knees to ankles and loose on the thigh.
<i>Swadeshi</i>	— Indian-made.
<i>Swami</i>	— Saint; Master.
<i>Swar</i>	— Horseman.
<i>Swaraj</i>	— Self-Government.
<i>Swatantryaveer</i>	— Hero in the struggle for independence.
<i>Tamasgir</i>	— Leader of a troupe with dancing girls singing rustic folksongs.
<i>Thala</i>	— Brass or copper plate.
<i>Vakeel</i>	— Ambassador; Advocate.
<i>Vatan</i>	— Land, almost tax-free, given for service rendered.
<i>Vihar</i>	— Buddhist sanctuary.
<i>Wada</i>	— Mansion in Maharashtra.
<i>Yoga</i>	— Science of fullest control of senses and emancipation of soul from bodily control.
<i>Zoli</i>	— Loose cloth bag hanging from the shoulder under the armpit.
<i>Zuloom</i>	— Outrageous treatment.

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